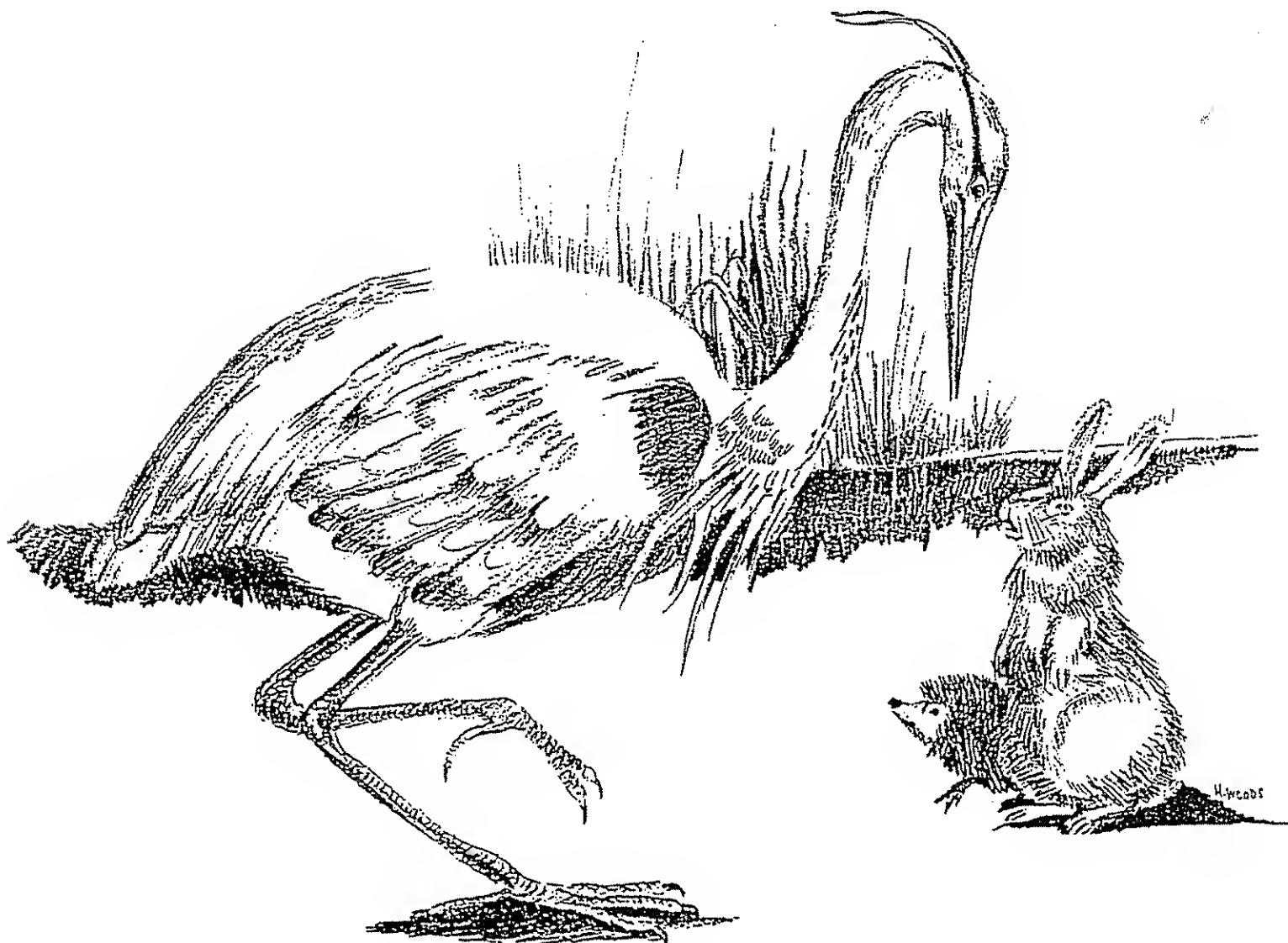


Wonders from the ark



Christopher V. Cardew

- 1) **SCUTTERFORD BUNS** - (4553 words) A delightful story that stirs the emotions in several ways: in England, shortly after a planting festival, the Scutterfords are gassed out of their warren, leaving only their leader alive; he is guided overland and across the sea on a great ship to Cape Town where he finally finds his new home.
- 2) **RIVER OTTER, MIRALDA & SAMMY** - (5330 words) Starts in the south west of England. Swimming warily upstream the family hear the sounds of dogs and men too late for all of them to escape. Miralda is caught and savagely torn to pieces by the dogs, which distract the pack to allow father and son to escape. Later they are parted for a while when Sammy is drawn to a magical timeless undersea cave. Eventually they are reunited by strange destiny and a man with the blue of the sea in his eyes.
- 3) **Hlawehee & Pushita in THE SACRIFICE** - (9434 words) Deep in Minnesota about 400 years ago, this story relates the adventures of a rabbit and a hedgehog who feel stirring within them the need to find God. They set out through woods, on over rolling hills and plains to a great lake, and ask their question of all whom they meet, even of Salissa, the snake, the murderer who lies. They pass through many adventures and dangers, but at last find God through Galutu, the badger. Later, in a forest fire, their sacrifice is called for in a dramatic ending to oust forever the evil power of Ishkoopurda, mighty Indian god and friend of Salissa. The varying answers given to these two animals from birds and animals to whom they put their question are a reflection not only of the creatures themselves, but also of human reactions, mainly in ignorance, boredom, evasiveness and deception.
- 4) **B-4-TIS-** (5912 words) When the myxamatosis plague was at its height in the south of England during the early 1960s, there lived a doctor rabbit who spent himself, even to the loss of his own family, in saving many stricken rabbits from blindness and the agonies of a stifling death with overdoses (the third and final spoon) of his own herbal soporific medicine. At last the scene lies desolate; stricken to the heart he wanders off alone, and is taken in by a Franciscan Brother. In due course both of them fly to Johannesburg. Shortly after, his friend, the monk, dies, and a certain evil-minded priest of the Parish kicks B-4-tis out of the Church. Weeping, lost and homeless, he is taken in by an unusual man and his wife who were passing by the Church, with whom he finds himself again, a home and peace.
- 5) **GARIBALDI** - (5105 words) On the moors in the middle north of England, this is the exciting and poignant story of a young hare and his sister who are frequently hunted by men and dogs. Garibaldi's sister is cornered, torn and mauled to death. Later Garibaldi is very nearly caught in a deadly hunt by men on horseback, hounds and greyhounds; a river, a weir and a waterfall break the hunt at his point of exhaustion. A desperate leap into turbulent water, over the weir, some unexpected help from Sonseehray, the daughter of a very unusual man, and Garibaldi is saved.
- 6) **GREAT GREY OVERBUNS** - (2807 words) Short as this story is, it is a concluding drawstring for those before. It leads to the hub of life and the golden truth, the link between man and animal; it involves a double shooting, some fast action, and the eventual uniting on the road to Eternity of the hunter and the hunted.
- 7) **Bartimeaus & The Cat in THE FORGOTTEN LAND** - (8833 words) Primarily an anthropomorphic tale with a human observer, who later tells this strange adventure through the mind and eyes of Barty. It is a story based in a hot and humid land, of primitive and seductive voodoo practices, of similar past cultures with diverse living. It is also a story of courage and fear, beauty and violence; but above all it is a story that should lift the minds of readers beyond the level of base materialism into the eternal realms of wonder and beauty.

There are 18 pencil-and-shade drawings among stories 1 to 6.
With hyphenated words taken as one, the total word count = 42 695.

Author:- Christopher V. Cardew.

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SCUTTERFORD BUNS

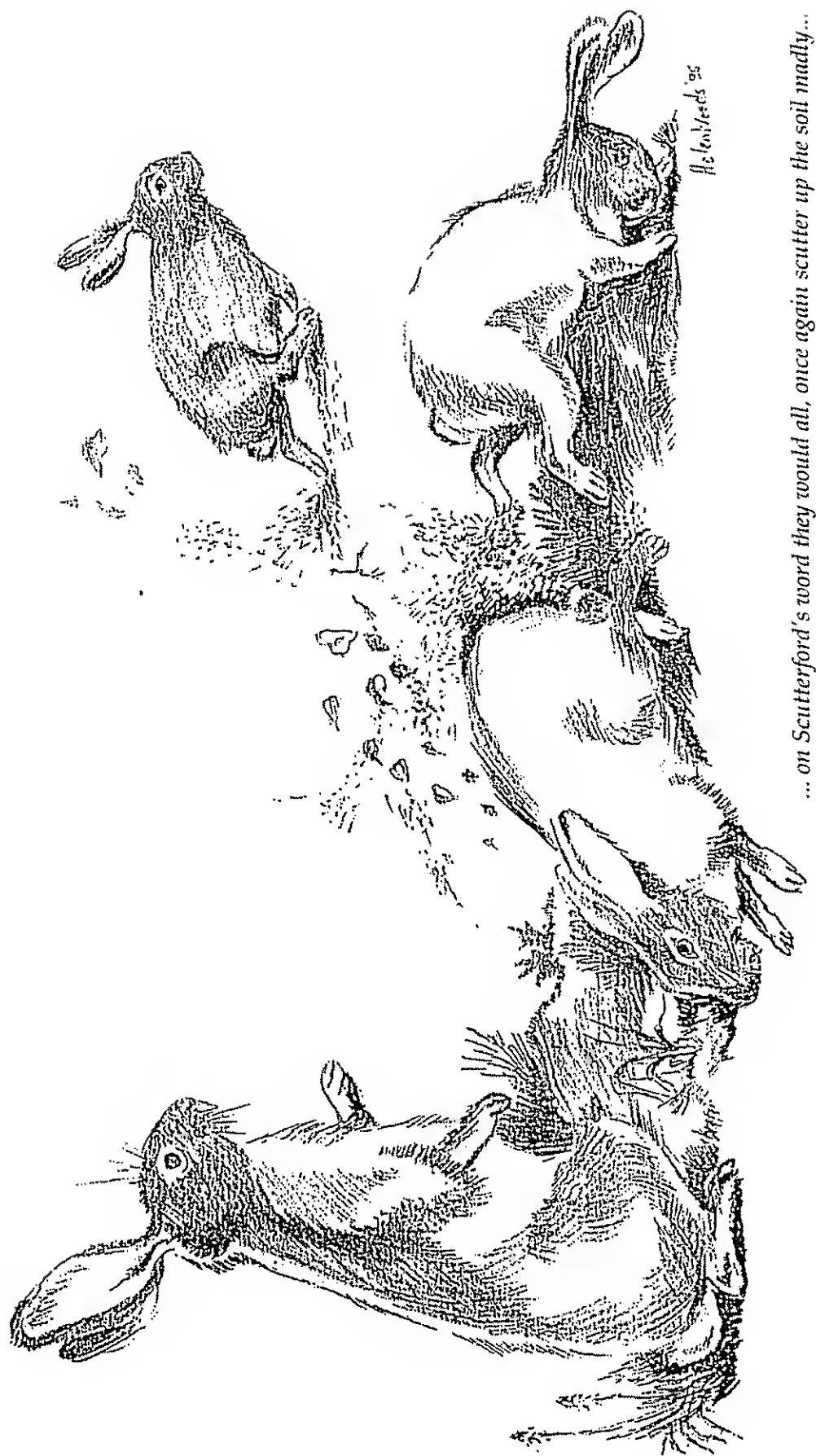
Quite a long time ago, far and wide, Scutterford Buns was known as leader of a warren in the hills near Winchester; 'far-and-wide' meaning perhaps a couple of fields away, while 'leader' meant only as far back as they could remember. The Scutterfords had lived in a complex network of burrows about the roots of a great old Oak tree on the edge of a wood, and within the wide spread of this, and sometimes a little beyond, Scutterford and his relations used to grow carrots, lettuces, cabbages, dandelions and buttercups, with various other plants that accidentally found their way on to the land they claimed as their own, and which rabbits love to eat.

If the truth be known, these vegetables and flowers were not always very well planted; that is to say that the Scutterfords would venture out at night and collect seeds from the farmer's store and vegetable patch, putting each type into different little bags, but nearly always they became mixed up as they usually forgot which plants, or into which bag they had been put; more often than not the end result was a muddled mixture of seeds. When this happened, which I regret to say was generally the case, Scutterford would empty all the seeds into one old bag, after which he and all his relations - 15 to 20 of them - would then set out with great vigour and dig up the soil in all directions with their strong back legs.

This prelude to a festival was a highlight of the year, one which they all enjoyed immensely as soil, leaves, twigs and general forest trash were sent flying about in all directions. However they soon grew tired of doing this, for it was wearing work, so Scutterford would then call them all together, martial them into some sort of line, and give each rabbit a buttercup full of sweet dandelion wine to drink - after which, with great hilarity, they would eat their buttercups. Then came the serious part as the rabbits lined up again, and from the old bag Scutterford gave each one two heaped paws of seeds; when they were all holding their seeds, he told them to scatter these about under the wide spread of the great old oak tree.

The seed was duly scattered, if rather haphazardly, and sometimes a little wildly, but it was all scattered around. The final phase was a repetition of the first, for on Scutterford's word they would all once again madly scatter up the soil, some seeds were too deep to germinate, others too shallow, while many were sent flying high in the air to be caught by the wind and blown away: (the farmer never understood how it was that several different types of vegetables and wild flowers would pop up in the middle of his wheat or barley near the old oak tree). However, there was always plenty of seed, and most did fall on the churned-up soil at the right depth to grow, although mixed-up and not as originally intended.

This was an annual affair that occurred some time during April or May, but when it did happen, many rabbits from far and wide (a couple of fields away) gathered round to watch and clap their paws in excitement, for among their own kind, or from any other woodland creatures, they had never seen such advanced farming before. But the best time of all was after the planting, for then Scutterford, and some of the older members of his extensive family, would draw on the rest of their dandelion wine, and pass his around to all the visiting rabbits. When this was all drunk, in great joy and with much rabbit laughter, they would all eat their buttercups, for such was the age-old custom. Finally, with many goodbyes and hopping around, they would eventually depart in twos or threes to their various burrows to sleep off the excitement and general carnival atmosphere of the day.



... on Scutterford's word they would all, once again scutter up the soil madly...

Was it any wonder that the Scutterfords, with their leader, became so well known in the neighbourhood. It was a position which Scutterford Buns bore lightly, for he was shy and quite a humble fellow. The actual origin of Scutterford's name was lost in the mists of time (a few generations), but his name must have arisen from their original methods of farming. Those were happy and carefree days, which now, alas, are gone forever.

Early one Spring morning, as winter had lost its grip, the farmer decided to widen his field by cutting down several trees along the whole width of the wood. He would start at the top end where the Scutterfords' old Oak tree stood. The rabbits knew nothing of all this until it actually began to happen; when it did, it was far worse than they could ever have imagined.

One morning five men drove up in a Landrover loaded with saws, tools, nets and a bag of pegs, also an ominous-looking gas cylinder. They stopped near the old Oak tree by the edge of the field. An instinctive fear filled the Scutterfords; theirs had been such a good home for many, many years; now all of them who had been outside scampered underground as fast as they could; only Scutterford Buns remained waiting, and this was really the arm of destiny as he happened to be alone foraging around about fifty yards away. At first he sat up, ears pricked, wondering what to do; he feared to make a dash for the warren because the men were already under the tree. Numb and terrified, he sat and watched, his heart beating with dread, for he knew that something awful was about to happen.

It did: save for two, the men methodically blocked every burrow entrance; over the main one they pegged down a loosely drooped length of netting beside which stood two men with clubs; meanwhile, and attached to the dreaded cylinder, they thrust down what seemed to be a long shiny wiggly stick. When all was ready the farmer did something to the stem, and there came the sound of a muffled hissing deep underground. The horrible smell of it wafted across to Scutterford Buns, so that he backed away, and yet became more afraid as both instinct and simple reason told him that they meant to kill all the Scutterfords. He was locked into the scene with staring eyes; his past and his present were being destroyed before him, as all his relatives were being taken away, dead. He could not leave; could not run away; he had to watch to the bitter end, an end without hope.

Underground there was a quick and frantic chaos as the toxic fumes seeped through every one of the intricate maze of burrows; a wave of poison that overcame many of the rabbits where they lay or crouched, for they could neither move forward nor backward to avoid it. A few, who seemed perhaps to be were fortunate, were able to run ahead of the gas up to one of the exits, only to be helplessly tangled in the net, where they were clubbed to death.

With a deep sob drawn from his agonised mind, Scutterford Buns knew that it was all over, that he was the last of his line, that his home and family were gone forever. The visible and invisible bonds which had held him were broken, and he leapt away, though he knew not whither, and ran on for a mile or so until he was panting and out of breath: there he dropped to the rough grass and lay awhile, recovering.

Scutterford, the last of the Scutterfords, had never been alone before, not truly alone; always there had been his family where one joy had been everybody's joy, and any tragedy or loss had been shared by all of them. Now the burden of this terrible calamity sat solely on Scutterford, until he felt its weight would surely crush him to the ground and break his heart...

Time passed, during which Scutterford loped on and on, led somehow, somewhere by Great Grey Overbuna. Through woods, down lanes, across roads, he hopped on by day and slept where he could by night, eating and drinking when and where he was able. He had with him only one of his small possessions: a blue spotted handkerchief which went with him everywhere, except when it was being washed; his other odds and ends had been in the burrow.

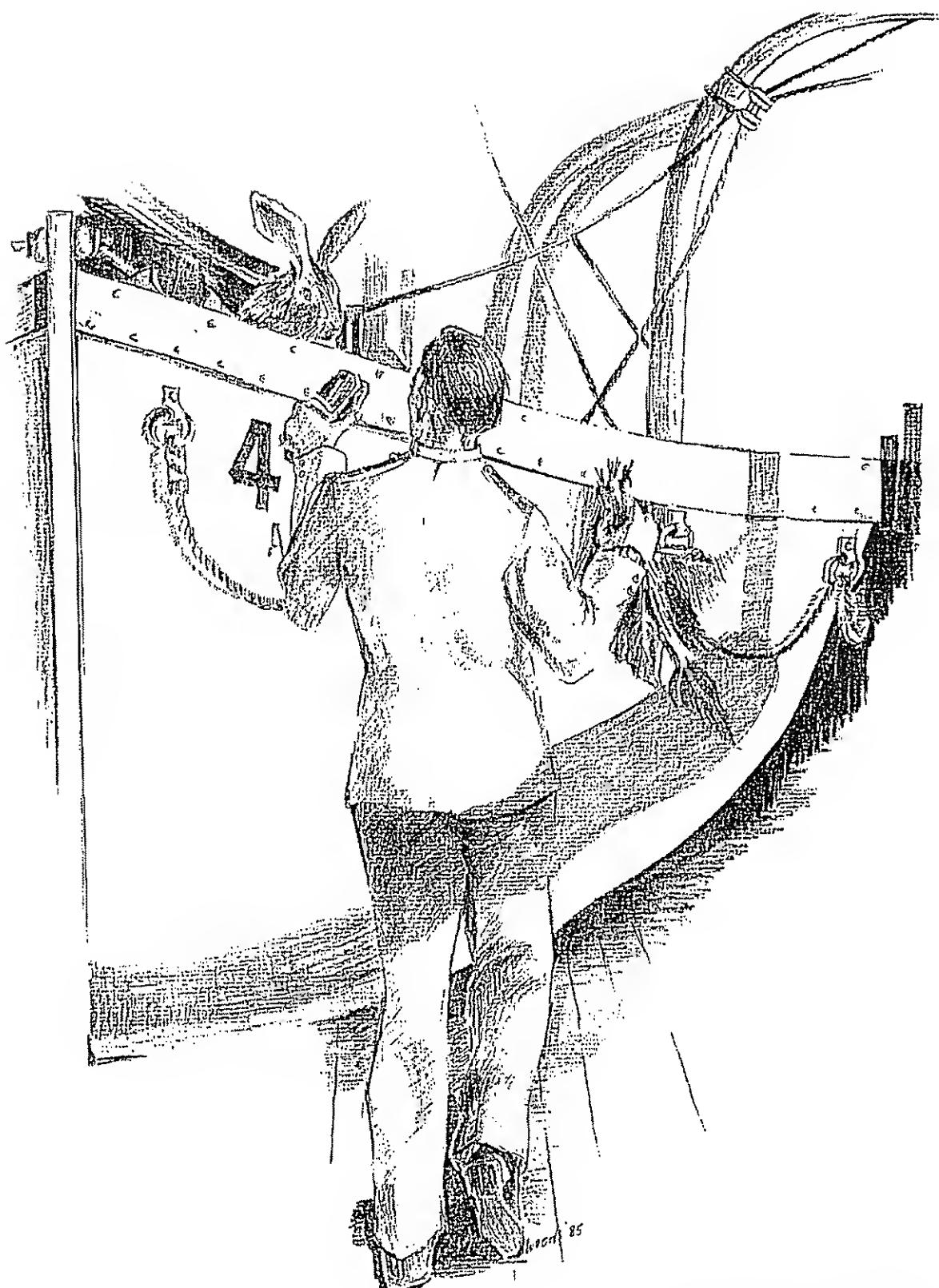
At length he reached the outskirts of a great city and a seaport; here Scutterford was led by Great Grey Overbuns to a field close to the city; he knew that he should lie up there and regain some of his strength. He rested in a hedgerow, eat a carrot he had with him, and fell asleep. To the little fellow, after travelling all these long days, everything was quite new and frightening; yet above all he knew he must follow the guiding spirit of Great Grey Overbuns in whom he had absolute faith. He spent the rest of that day and night, and then another day in which he found a plot with some fresh, juicy vegetables, and into the evening of his his second night; he was greatly refreshed, before he again felt the urge to move on.

In the country it would have been dark and secure at night, and by this time Scutterford would have long since been tucked up warmly deep in his burrow; but this human part of the world was speckled with light patches lit by bright globes that hung from high pillars, and which lit the way from grass verges to rough ground to streets and pavements. Scutterford knew that Great Grey Overbuns was guiding him, yet although he felt his leading spirit, still he trembled with fear at the hard cold pavements under his pads, foreign noises and strange smells, and the barking of scavenging dogs. Still he hopped on and on down back ways and side alleys, until at length he came to the great port itself. Although he never knew it, Scutterford had hopped his way right through Southampton, and so wise had been Great Grey Bun's guidance that at no time had he been in any danger.

Scutterford was tiring, but still he loped on and on through the vast dockyard, past ships of all sizes, great cranes that soared up like gaunt spectral towers reaching high into the night sky, and always on either one side, or both, was a vastness of oily water on which these great ships sat. Finally Scutterford came to a ship taller and greater than any he had passed before; here he stopped, for he knew he had to go up on to this huge liner glowing with lights along its full length.

A long enclosed gangway reached down from the ship to the dock below with a barrier at both ends; these were no impediment to Scutterford who simply hopped his way up the gangplank under the two barriers. Guided by inatinct, he turned unerringly towards the bow and hopped on along the smooth and spotlessly clean deck, then up a few steps and into a lifeboat which had loose awning. Here at last he felt at peace within himself as he knew this was to be his, at least for the time being. Scutterford sank down and went to sleep almost immediately, worn out by the strain, and clutching his now rather grubby blue-spotted handkerchief in one paw. . . .

The ship was the Windsor Castle bound for Cape Town and Durban; in fact it sailed very early the next morning, and so quietly did it slip its moorings that the tired little rabbit never even woke up. Another whole story could be written about this sea voyage, but let it suffice to say that Scutterford, although apprehensive at times, was fortunate that a kindly steward saw him, one who felt so sorry for the lonely rabbit that in fact Scutterford lacked for nothing. By day he stayed in the lifeboat, but every evening his new-found friend would come along and slip him all sorts of



That evening his friend, the steward came to see him for the last time...

vegetables and foods. Later at night Scutterford would hop out of the lifeboat and take to exploring the bow of the ship, which was quite secluded, and generally scamper around until, as the voyage progressed, he got to know just about every square inch of this part of the great ship.

As the huge liner drew close to Cape Town - which was in fact due to dock the very next morning - Scutterford knew that this was to be his last night aboard, the last night during which he could scamper around, and peer over the edge at the hissing water rushing by far below, the last night when he would go to sleep to the heavy lift and sink of the great ship, and the deep thrumming from far below which never stopped during the whole voyage, but which he found pleasant and soothing: Scutterford was becoming quite used to ships and a life at sea, indeed he was beginning to think of himself as a nautical sailor rabbit.

That same evening his friend the steward came to see him for the last time, bringing with him more food than usual, and also a small parcel. "Open it up," he said, smiling kindly. Scutterford was quite overcome and didn't know where to look or what to say. Trembling slightly, he took the parcel and unwrapped it; then, with excited oohs and squeaks he lifted out one article after another: there was a little blue jacket with real brass buttons which fitted perfectly; then there was another handkerchief, white with red spots, and two more things; a lovely little floppy basket for him to carry his possessions, and a small blue leather purse with a snapper to hold it shut; but when he picked this up in his paws it was quite heavy; he opened it carefully and peeped inside, and poured out the contents on to the floor of the lifeboat - a shower of silver coins fell out: ten 50 cent pieces, more money than he had ever seen!

Scutterford looked up to try and thank his friend, the steward, but there was no one there, not a sign of him anywhere. He hopped out of the boat and looked all around, but there was no one at all. This was very strange since Scutterford, like all proper rabbits, had very keen hearing. Then, while he was thinking, a gentle rabbit's voice spoke in his mind, telling him that all these gifts, and the food he had received on the voyage, came from Great Grey Overbuns because she loved him so, and he was in her care.

Scutterford understood. Very thoughtfully he returned to his lifeboat, thinking deeply and filled with simple wonder and love, for he was growing in wisdom. One by one he picked up the ten 50 cent pieces and put them into his little blue purse, then clicked it shut. He carefully folded his new blue jacket with real brass buttons, followed by the red-spotted handkerchief, and packed them away in the bottom of his floppy basket. Lastly he gathered up most of the carrots and other vegetables and put them into the plastic bag in which they had been given, leaving out sufficient for that night and the next day; these he put on top of the other gifts so that the little basket was full, but not too full. Finally he sank down quietly on to the floor of the boat, with one paw holding his precious possessions, and went to sleep.

Early the next morning the Windsor Castle docked at Cape Town. All was hustle and noise, and Scutterford felt a little afraid; but then he remembered Great Grey Overbuns and all her wonderful gifts, and the fear left him. All that day and far into the following night, he sat quietly in the bottom of his lifeboat, until the noises gradually died away and the great ship rested quietly. Late that night Scutterford felt impelled to move. He had long since eaten the vegetables he had put out for the day, so all he had to do was to pick up his new floppy basket with all his treasures



he had the strange
urge to put on his new blue

SCUTTERFORD BUNS.

in it, so all he had to do was to pick up his new floppy basket, and made his way down the long gangplank, guided as before by Great Grey Overbuns; but this time he feared less, for his trust was greater, and his journey not dissimilar to that through Southampton.

After Scutterford had loped a long way, the houses gradually began to thin out as the hill became, until at last it gave way to hard tufted grass. Up and up he hopped, becoming very tired as it was a long way from where the ship was moored, nearly all of it uphill, while his floppy basket felt increasingly heavy for such a long journey. At last he came to a grassy overhang, beneath which was a short rocky cave, dry, warm and secluded, and he knew this to be his home for a while. He put down his bag with its precious possessions, then flopped down to rest, too tired even to nibble at a carrot or a lettuce leaf; even with the spirit guidance of Great Grey Overbuns all around him, the journey through the town had been long and arduous, further draining from his depleting strength on the hard pavements, and on his nerves which had been constantly tense and strained.

So it was that at length Scutterford became more used to his temporary home; he had eaten all the fresh food given to him by the kind steward, but he had found a plentiful supply of wild vegetables vegetables nearby. Then, without warning, he had a strange urge to put on his new blue coat with the shiny brass buttons, and with his red-spotted handkerchief folded neatly and slid carefully into the top pocket so that it just showed. He paused as a great wave of loneliness swept over him, making him wonder just why he was there at all, so far from his warren, family and home he had known so well: now all gone or dead; instead he was waiting in the hills above the port city of Cape Town, so far from all that he knew and loved, but now dead rabbits lying in crumbling, dry and dusty tunnels. He had not even met another rabbit for a long time. Then Scutterford's mind was calmed as the enveloping presence of Great Grey Overbuns filled him his whole being, and he knew he was not alone; she urged him down into the city itself in the middle of a bright sunny morning!

Scutterford knew that urge very well, and trusted it completely; sighing nervously, but with a tremor of excitement, he picked up his new blue purse with the snapper fastener and held it close to him, but decided that was not very safe, so put it into his inside pocket, which was much better; then he set off down the hill for town, leaving his floppy basket in the cave, inside which was his now rather grubby red-spotted handkerchief.

Down the hill he went, looking very smart, and on by the street with its houses and pavements: apprehensive, yet strangely he seemed to pass people unnoticed; so it was all the way into the thick of a busy city, the strong force of being guided was very compelling in him; then he came to a large and magnificent shop. He turned in and went upstairs - he had never before been up any stairs, being used to the underground slopes of his burrows - into the tea room where he found a table with a lovely clean blue and white cloth, hopped on to the chair and sat down. Very soon a smart waitress came to take his order as if everything was perfectly normal. "May I have a pot of tea and some sugar please," he asked nervously, sitting very upright. She scribbled something on a pad, tore it off, put it by Scutterford on the table, and bustled away to take some other orders.

Cautiously, Scutterford looked around the tea room, watching for any signs of danger, but there were none; everyone was involved in conversation and their tea and cakes, and for all his smart blue coat with its shiny brass

buttons nobody took any notice of him at all: it was all very odd, and he felt very out of place, yet with the comforting presence of Great Grey Overbuns, Scutterford felt that perhaps he really was somebody, and that it was not all just a dream.

The tea arrived, a shiny chromium pot, a small jug of milk, another jug full of hot water, and a beautiful china cup and saucer with blue flowers, green leaves and brown stems twined them. Very carefully Scutterford poured a little milk into the cup, then filled it with tea, finally putting in three lumps of sugar before stirring it with a spoon. He sat and sipped, until at last there was none left, no milk and only one lump of sugar; he picked up the last lump, turned it around in his paws, then popped it into his mouth.

Scutterford had sat there for quite a long time, and knew that he must leave very soon. He had been watching people come and go, and noticed that everyone took the slip of paper left by the waitress to a desk where he had heard the chink of coins. Scutterford couldn't read what was on the paper, but he took out his blue snapper purse and went up to the counter with the paper; he reached up and put the paper on the counter, and with it one of his 50-cent coins. The paper went on to a spike and his coin rattled into a till - there was no change. 'What an expensive tea,' he thought, '50 whole cents!' Now he had only nine coins left; still, this was what Great Grey Overbuns wanted him to do, and who was he, a poor lone rabbit, to question her guidance.

Anyway, in a funny sort of way he had quite enjoyed it; although in spite of the close presence of Great Grey Overbuns, he felt very lonely, for he had no friends or family left on Earth, none who loved him just for himself. Musing thus rather sadly, but feeling very full of tea, and just a little sick from all the sugar he'd had, Scutterford made his way back up the hill, past the fringes of the town, and into the little cave which was his home for the time being. Here he took off his coat, folded it neatly, and with his red-spotted handkerchief put both into his floppy basket, with his blue snapper purse and nine remaining 50-cent pieces underneath.

For two whole weeks, from Monday to Friday, Scutterford made his way down to Stuttafords for tea, for that was where he had been directed to go, then afterwards back again to his little cave, and although the spirit of Great Grey Overbuns was with him on each trip, he felt a weakening of her nearness around him; consequently his apprehension and loneliness increased.

On the Friday morning, his last possible trip to Stuttafords, he dressed himself with extra care, twitched and shook his little blue coat with the brass buttons to get out any last creases, making sure that his red-spotted handkerchief was just so, and checked his last 50-cent coin in his blue purse. He was about to leave when he felt a curious urge to take with him his floppy basket; so, always obedient to the call of Great Grey Overbuns, he set off with all his possessions, even his old blue-spotted handkerchief in the bottom of the floppy bag.

At first all went as before, but while he was sipping his tea, he felt the presence of Great Grey Overbuns withdraw. Scutterford became increasingly alarmed and his fear grew as he spiritually looked into a vacuum: for weeks she had been with him, never less than a quiet presence, but now she had definitely gone. Shaking, almost rigid with terror, Scutterford got up and made his way to the counter to pay for his tea, carrying his floppy bag and



utterly dejected and bedraggled, looked up at the big man...

few possessions with him; his only wish was to get out and run as fast as he could back to the safety of his little cave. He fumbled in his pocket for his blue snpper purse with his last 50-cent piece in it, but in his fear and haste the coin dropped out and rolled away before he could see where it had gone. . .

"That'll be 50 cents," said the woman behind the counter.

Rigid with terror, his mind almost paralysed, Scutterford clutched his now empty purse in one paw and his floppy bag in another: "Please, I've lost my only 50 cents, what. . . ."

The woman with a hard look in her eyes peered at him bleakly - "Why, you're only a rabbit, and a thieving one too! Wait there! I'll call the Police!"

Then one of the waiters grabbed him by the coat so roughly that one of his brass buttons was ripped off, and his left pocket torn until it hung down forlornly.

Heaven knows what would have happened to Scutterford, who was in a wretched state of terror, had not at that moment a kindly man of distinction and presence, followed closely by his lady, walked into the tea room.

There was an immediate pause and silence in the room, while the waiter and the woman behind the counter looked distinctively sheepish and crestfallen. Scutterford meanwhile, utterly dejected and bedraggled, looked up at the big man and his lady through tear-filled eyes; he looked from one to the other, then back again, and inside him he felt a deep and growing peace, that Great Grey Overbuns had led him all this way across unknown land and sea, through two strange cities and up and down a long hill to and from his cave to this kind-hearted man and his lady. He knew here with these two understanding and loving people he had found his new home, his real final and permanent home for always and always; perhaps even more of a home than that of the Scutterfords of the old oak tree, now so far away, although he would always remember his life there. Now he would never leave these wonderful people, nor they him.

And it was so.

A few days later Scutterford's cup overflowed with joy when the kindly man of distinction, with the brilliant blue eyes of the oceans, spoke to him in the simple international language instinctive to all proper animals and birds, but not to any bloodless creature, nor to snakes who slithered along the ground, or in some cases in trees; these were known to be deceitful and full of guile and treachery.

RIVER OTTER, MIRALDA and SAMMY.

It should be noted here that while otter was a river otter, he became well known for giving river hunters the slip by using the sea as an escape route, so he was often referred to as 'Sea Otter', or to some as just 'That damned Otter ! 'However, River Otter himself was quite unaware of these dual names.

The tragedy that cost the life of Otter's beloved Miralda has always been a deep and lasting sorrow to him, one that he will bear with him to the end of his days; indeed, it was only due to skill, experience and good fortune that he managed at least to get Sammy away and to safety - for a while at any rate. But let me start nearer the beginning, when Otter and Miralda were one, and when Sammy, their only offspring, was still inexperienced and young in the wily, cruel ways of men and their river-hunting dogs.

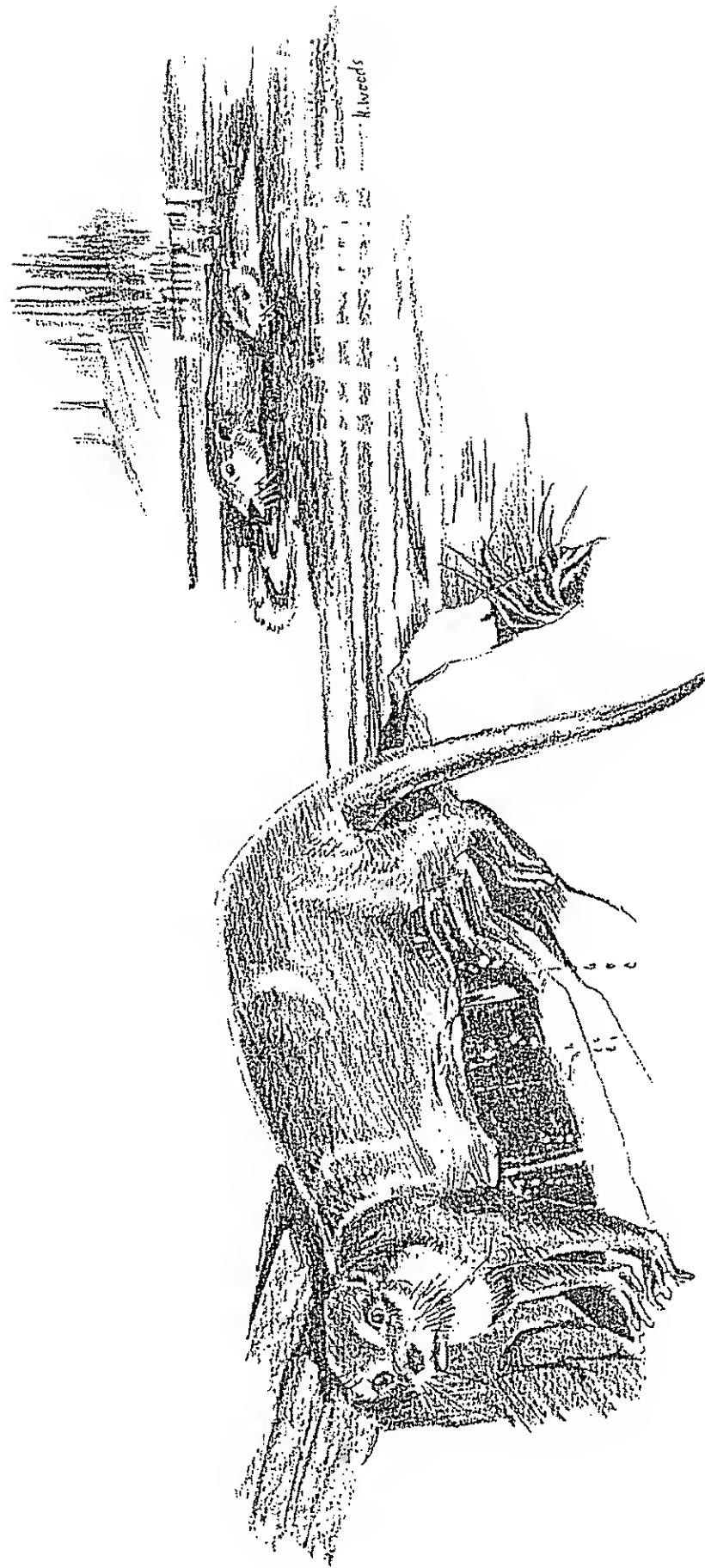
As was their way at certain times of the year, Otter, Miralda and Sammy swam up a river on the west coast of England. Now River Otter knew very well that sometimes men and dogs hunted otters around this same river and its various inlets, but he could neither sense nor smell any danger on that day, and their inner compulsion to swim inland against the current was very strong, too strong to resist; so with great care they swam upstream, with Sammy between them, while keeping a careful watch.

They must have swum upriver some thee or four miles, when away from the middle of the river they came upon a wonderful pool, deep and wide, with many fine fish to be caught. They were hungry, so for nearly an hour they forgot their caution and dived and swam, twisting about lithely with swift grace to catch their prey; so they caught and eat until all three were gorged and full, after which they rolled on their backs in the water, crossed their paws and slept lightly.

A short while later Otter heard faintly the baying of hounds: a sound once heard, never forgotten, be they ever so far away. Immediately alert to danger, quick as a flash he woke Miralda and Sammy, and together they turned back to the sea with its wider freedom of movement and comparative safety. But it was too late to get far enough to be safe because Sammy was young, without sufficient stamina and strength to swim and run fast enough along river banks, through shallows and all those miles to the sea. River Otter knew this, so persuaded Miralda to take Sammy and swim on, while he acted as bait to delay the dogs and the cruel men with their heavy sticks. Miralda had no choice; with an awful premonition of loss tearing at her heart, she swam on down-river with Sammy who, not fully grasping what was going on, was both afraid and excited at the same time.

Soon afterwards the men spotted River Otter as he showed himself, and some of the hounds were set on him in a pool thy had reached, while Miralda and Sammy had swum on alone. But the chief huntsman was wily, and he thought it strange that at this season one male otter in his prime would be alone, so he sent others of their number down-river with about half the dogs.

The hounds bounded along the river banks, sniffing their way and baying excitedly. It was not very long before they caught up with Miralda and Sammy, who were at that moment hiding together a yard or so away from the bank by an out-jutting tree root among some long weeds, lying quite still with only their eyes and noses showing just above the water. Most of the dogs ran on past, but one older and more experienced hound, was suspicious, and stopped to sniff the air again. The others paused after seeing they were out-distancing their leader, so came back and started to wade into the



At length Sea Otter persuaded Miralda to take Sammy and swim on while he acted as bait for the dogs and the cruel men with sticks...

water just as the chief huntsman came up to them. He waited, for he knew these particular dogs as being cautious but exceptionally tenacious: the hounds showed no inclination to leave this section of the river, so milled around in the water, for they knew that at least one otter was nearby.

The chief hunter, a red-faced man, gambled on his experience and from the actions of these three hounds: he delayed no longer, but put his horn to his lips and blew, both upstream and down to recall the whole pack from both behind and ahead; he was sure the dog otter would follow to where its mate was hiding. This section of the river was wide, mostly shallow with a stony bed, but with some unexpected depths, all of which Miralda had noted as the three hounds ranged about with the wind idly drifting from various quarters, until at length one of them caught the scent of otter, although they could not for the moment pin the source. Miralda knew the time was close when she would have to make a break to draw them off.

Meanwhile River Otter, realising that the focus of the hunt had shifted downstream, was filled with dread and a great fear for both Miralda and Sammy; with the heat of the hunt on them he knew they could never make it without him: with all his strength and speed he fled downstream, running, bounding, swimming and rippling his way along foot-paths, through shallows and into deeper water, with the remnants of the pack after him, urged on by the cruel huntsmen who-whoong on their horns, until the whole river was a splashing, seething turmoil of dogs, men, mud, and one rather poor otter; terrified, but more afraid for Miralda and Sammy; although he had not as yet seen them, he could guess where they were hidden because the first part of the pack were milling around a wider and more open part of the river.

On the tow paths the dogs were faster than River Otter, so he frequently had to leap into the river and dive and twist to avoid his pursuers and the crunch of their powerful jaws. Then he came upon the place where the river widened, alternatively shallow and deep, and where instinctively he knew Miralda and Sammy were lying hidden.

With the growing numbers of dogs, he knew that their cover must soon be broken and that Miralda would have to break cover with terrible results. His quick and experienced eyes spotted the out-jutting tree root, disguised in part on the river-side by long-stemmed water weeds, behind which rose a tow path. By squirming and diving with elastic ease, River Otter snapped underwater at the legs of several of the dogs, all the time making his way in a sweeping curve towards where he knew Miralda and Sammy lay concealed, drawing off the two more experienced dogs as he did so, although he had no idea just how he could help when he reached them, for in the maelstrom of hounds and men that crowded and harried so strongly they could scarcely avoid in eventually making a kill.

River Otter was tiring; he knew he could not maintain this incredible pace much longer; still he drew closer to the out-jutting tree root, with most of the pack after him, although so great was the chaos he had caused in his wake that many of the dogs were plunging about wildly in all directions seeking their elusive quarry, and several bore bite marks from both River Otter and their own savage comrades, for that here and there fights had broken out, which the huntsmen with heavy sticks were trying with little success to break up; but even on the fringe of this chaotic melee, the chances of the three otters escaping were still frighteningly slim.

River Otter did not know what to do; he had no plan of

action in his mind, save perhaps to join his beloved Miralda and Sammy and make as strong an end as possible. Even in the midst of this bloody scene of savage activity, a deadly depression settled on his mind: he knew the face of death, and was unafraid for himself, for he had come close to this spectre before; but he feared terribly the loss of his little family whom he loved with all his warm heart and strength; alone he might well have made it back to the open sea and freedom, but to do him credit such a thought never even entered his head.

Then suddenly, when River Otter was within a few yards of the jutting root, he glimpsed Miralda's flat head and brown eyes as she quietly broke cover and dived, swimming towards him. Immediately Otter dived as well, and the mated couple met briefly underwater, touched noses, then passed. River Otter knew and understood Miralda's purpose, but there was nothing he could do to help her in his temporarily tired out and weakened state to change their unexpected courses of destiny, for there was Sammy to save. With a breaking heart he swam on until he surfaced cautiously in the shadow of the out-jutting tree root next to a very frightened Sammy. He waited a while as Miralda drew the dogs away from their hiding place.

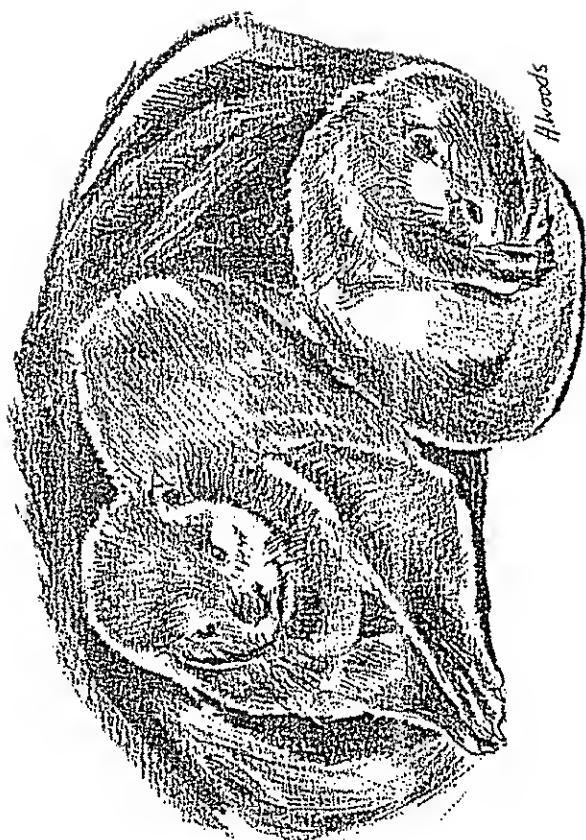
Miralda was inspired in this her last battle, and as long as her own strength held out (for the hounds had not yet noticed a change in otters) she leaped, bit, squirmed and dived, twisting here and there, adding to the confusion, but always moving away from the out-jutting tree root; all the while River Otter watched helplessly, his heart torn asunder, but determined now to save Sammy when opportunity was at its best.

That moment soon came when Miralda and the pack were over half-way across the river. Like two silvered, streamlined brown shadows, River Otter nudged Sammy out of the water behind the weeds, and the pair passed unnoticed by men and dogs on to the partially hidden tow-path. Without wasting any time they slipped along the path from cover to cover, until at last they passed out of sight of that dread, death-filled section of the river, the sights had gone, but the terrible sounds still hung in the air.

Tired as he was, River Otter pressed on, swimming, then bounding along in the shallower stretches, but now avoiding the tow paths so as to leave as little of their scent as possible for the hounds to follow; his heart was broken, but he was unsparing of himself and Sammy. Then, like a dagger in his chest, he caught the unmistakable cry of Miralda's gallant death: a single scream that faintly tore through the air, followed by the distant sounds of worrying dogs, and the hoarse shouts of men as they had seen the change of otters and strove fruitlessly to press the hunt on down-river, but the hounds were satiated and slow to obey. Meanwhile River Otter had barely paused, but pressed on down the river with as much speed as Sammy could manage - In Otter's mind there was the almost instinctive knowledge that at least Miralda's gallant death was not in vain.

Behind them lay a terrible scene of blood and chaos. Miralda had become too exhausted to maintain the fantastic pace for which she had sacrificed herself, and had eventually been caught by two dogs, one catching her and throwing her broken body high in the air, while both tore her to shreds as she fell. The rest of the hounds drove in and worried the body of the dying otter in a scene of awful carnage; but they had made their kill and sought no more for that day, only to rip at a scrap of fur or flesh for themselves.

So chaos had redoubled into yet greater chaos as they fought each other



...curled up together and soon were fast asleep

savagely over the remains of Miralda's torn body; her brave spirit with her sacrifice completed and successful. Only the cleverer, yet more cruel men, strove yet again to reclaim order and to drive the dogs on to hunt again, for with the change of otters there must be at least one more to seek and kill; but the dogs were quite out of control, and at length their brutal masters had to desist and call off the hunt.

When River Otter and Sammy were within a mile or so of the river's mouth, and when the sounds of the hunt had been left far behind, Otter knew that they were safe, but at the cost of Miralda's sacrifice: his heart was like a leaden weight, with a great emptiness where his beloved Miralda had been. Both of them had loved Sammy dearly; he was their first cub, and Otter's last, for he would never mate again; now for a while he alone must care for Sammy until he grew up and went his own way.

Yet in some indefinable way Sammy had always been different; like Miralda there was an ethereality which hung about him, an unusual warmth, a sort of inner light which seemed to flow quite naturally from his small frame which both River Otter and Miralda had found. Then, too, there was the problem of Sammy's size; he had grown to a certain point, and then stopped; he was in no way deformed, indeed he was perfectly built, but had physically just stopped growing at a comparatively early stage, yet he had kept his youth and quick intelligence, but with it a beauty far beyond the normal.

'Perhaps,' thought the stricken River Otter, 'perhaps Sammy would always need him while he lived, for he would never seek or accept another mate;' this last thought remained - There could only be one Miralda.

Otter slowed, and the tired Sammy gratefully followed suit. Both otters were very tired, so together they sought shelter for the night, and soon found an old dry, if rather musty, unused otters' home. Gratefully they crept inside, curled up together and were soon fast asleep, the dangers and terrors of that awful day behind them for a few short hours at least, lulled by the music from the widening river mouth which lapped gently outside.

In the weeks and months that followed, River Otter and Sammy traced their way along the coast-line, wending first east, the south, feeding as they went. Miralda was never forgotten by either of them, but the agonising sting of River Otter's loss diminished, leaving at first a great void, and then strangely her accompanying beauty in spirit, so much of which had been inherited by Sammy that Otter himself became more dependent on Sammy's closeness. This was a period of healing for River Otter, and with his own warm heart he responded by giving Sammy all the love and protection he had previously shared between two, and they became close companions.

At length River Otter and Sammy arrived at the kelp beds off Chichester; here they stayed for some long time, a healing time, for here the water was warmer, and there were plenty of fish, and occasionally lobsters. Daily that summer they explored the new sea foods and some undersea inlets and caves - but still Sammy grew no bigger, although he was firmer and stronger, and it was plain to River Otter that he never would grow any more: for the first time the deep sorrow and loneliness in River Otter's heart lifted a little as he dared to hope that their future together would be no more than a partial void without Miralda.

But nothing lasts forever; for sadly, joy is but a fleeting breath, while loss and emptiness are ever-present spectres that lie in wait for many, save

only for the multitudes who exist in the grey and empty zones, and who know neither dawn nor the peace of evening, but only the dark shadows of life.

So it was when one day Otter and Sammy were playing and collecting sea shells, that River Otter found himself alone. Alarm spread through him; the shell he had found was dropped, twinkling its way to the sea floor, and Otter dived to search for his lost Sammy.

The day was young, and River Otter searched everywhere, in and about the kelp beds and the swaying seaweed, even finally the scattered caves they had known. Hours passed, and as his own strength dwindled, so did his hopes and spirits as he covered again and again every crevice and cave they had known.

At length, the evening's sun drew long broken lines across the waves, and Otter, worn out, was aware only of a probable second loss; first Miralda and then Sammy: it was too much, for his hopes had been sapped during that long day. He let the waves wash over him, uncaring as to whether he drew in air or water; and there he might have died had not an observant fisherman, returning home after a day's fishing at sea, spotted River Otter floating helplessly, and lifted him into his laden boat.

The fisherman carried River Otter to his home, a small cottage above the foreshore, where both he and his wife did what they could to save him; but his recovery was reluctantly slow, for his mind was filled with a double sorrow, an emptiness that not even the loss of his Miralda had brought, for then at least there had been Sammy to live for, while now there was nothing. He eat a little only because it would have offended his kindly hosts had he not done so; but he became very weak and thin, and spent most of his days looking out of the cottage window, searching, always searching the sea shore in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of Sammy.

Such suffering could not last, and one day a strange man, ageless, with the sea in his eyes, called at the cottage from his home in Africa to meet again his old friends, the fisherman and his wife; by doing so they met River Otter, a sad shadow of his former self. To Otter's wonder, this unusual man spoke to him in a way that he could understand, using both voice and mind he could converse freely enough in the spirit language, understood by most creatures, great or small, but only rarely known by humans; the language of tone, of mind, of pictures and patterns, of knowing in almost an instant; used generally as the language of love, of God, among all proper animals and birds.

River Otter's dammed-up well of misery broke loose, and during the course of an evening, while often leaning his head on the man's knee, with tears and deep sobs sometimes shaking his body, his whole terrible story poured out. This wise man replied in the language of spirit and tone, gracious and calm in mind and voice, full of sympathy and true understanding, so that for the first time since Miralda, and now Sammy, had been lost to him, River Otter's heart was filled with renewed peace and hope; their loss was still there, leaving a gnawing vacuum in his innocent soul, but now there came the whisper of understanding, which in itself was not yet fully grasped, and a growing breadth of vision that still hovered just beyond his inner sight and mind to see and translate with clarity; but at least he knew peace, and could almost tangibly feel their presence, which was enough for the time; for through this partial understanding, that was as yet barely grasped at, and the breadth of vision not yet fully perceived, River Otter knew that the bonds between them were as strong as the core of life itself, and that

the illusory march of time could only part them for predesignated periods.

River Otter had his first full meal of fish since the loss of Sammy, and when replete, in complete trust he looked up at the wise and loving man, then curled up and went to sleep.

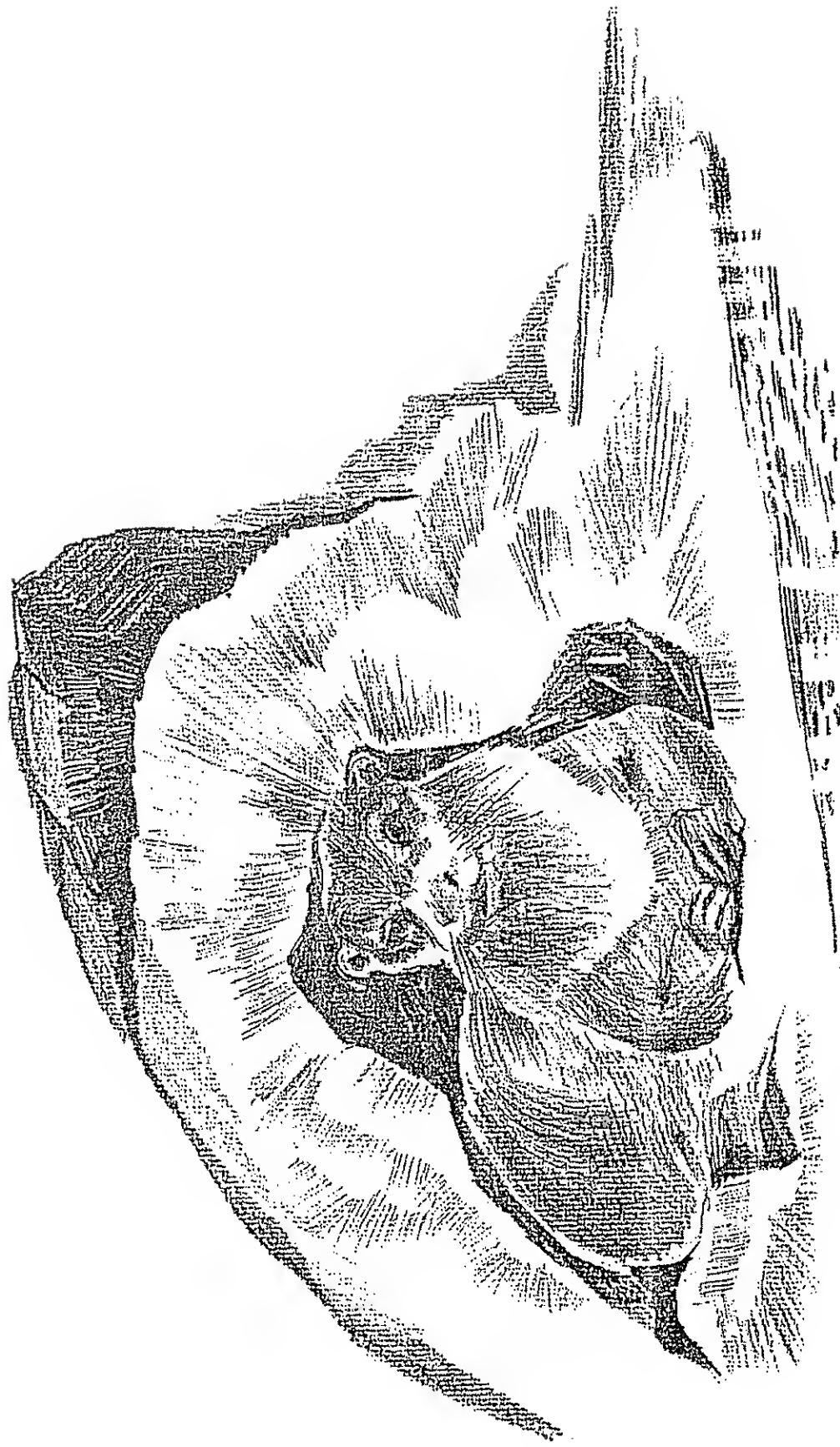
While River Otter slept deeply and peacefully, the strange man talked softly to his friends, the fisherman and his wife; together they planned Otter's immediate future, and it was agreed that he should stay with his kind hosts, the fisherman and his wife, at least until Otter recovered his health and strength, but also to delay for a week or so in case Sammy should turn up; meanwhile the fisherman, who was wise in the ways of many of the mysteries bound in the sea, and would keep a sharp look-out for a young otter, particularly around the kelp beds, for the permanent loss of Sammy under such apparently benign circumstances had too much of the unnatural to be accepted out-of-hand. Nevertheless, the possibility of Sammy's death could not be ruled out, so it was decided not to tell River Otter of their hopes and plans, so thereby falsely raising his hopes.

Before their wonderful visitor left, River Otter was told about other animals from the wild in England who lived with the man and his wife: two rabbits and a hare, each with some striking story. This unusually kind man had offered him a home close to the sea with them, but River Otter felt it was not yet time; he had to wait, search more and see: to all of which this wise man had nodded in agreement.

So it was that River Otter stayed with the kindly fisherman and his wife, to whom he became very attached. By day he would go out and hunt the areas in which he and Sammy had swum and explored, but with no result. However, at least he caught ample fish to feed himself and so saved the fisherman's daily catch from being depleted; but nothing could replace what he had lost, and at odd times he was seen gazing abstractedly through a window at nothing in particular, his mind far away, wandering in his lost world of dreams, of the three of them together, himself with Miralda and Sammy; but he would always remember the wonderfully kind wise man, with the sea in his eyes, who spoke the language common to all higher animals and birds of the wild, and who had offered him, and Sammy, if found, a home with himself and his lady; he had only to project the wish for this wise man to pick it up.

One day the fisherman received a letter from a friend of theirs near Chichester: Sammy had been found, and River Otter was told without delay. The tears of joy on the poor otter's face were wonderful to behold, and plans were quickly made to reunite the two of them at the fisherman's cottage. They would gladly have cared for them both, but he knew they were creatures of the wild, and the tame life with them, both active to live and explore, would eventually draw them away, regardless of how attached they became to himself and his wife.

Now that the trapped love in River Otter had been released, there was very little hesitation in his decision - The sea was close by, and rivers and kelp beds could be seen and swum in whenever they wished; but the gnawing fear of losing Sammy a second time, perhaps permanently, admixed with the callous brutality of mankind which prevailed in so much of the land, tipped the scales; alas, with his vivid imagination memories of that last battle with Miralda's torn body and blood-spattered death was always very much in his mind: it was these facts that finally decided River Otter that they must accept the wise visitor's offer; the man with the rich blue eyes, who



For no apparent reason Sammy's fear left him, and for an absolutely timeless moment he was in a state of perfect peace.

could converse with them in the language of the wild; they must go and live in Africa as he had asked them both, with the kindly man and his lady. River Otter sent out his thoughts and their wishes to the wonderful man he trusted who had love in his heart and the sea in his eyes; even from so far away he would know just what they both had to do.

Meanwhile, in the first place there was the important question as to how Sammy had become lost, or indeed whether in fact he had ever actually been lost at all. Who will know the full truth, certainly not Sammy; but here is his story as best it can be explained, which leaves no answer as to its aura of mystery:

Sammy had dived, intending to hide from River Otter for a while in a cave that only he had found; he swam some distance to the cave, flipped his way through its short entry tunnel, then surfaced into fresh air, and paddled up to a short steep beach on to which he clambered and waited. But this time the cave was different, mysterious even, for around him were green, lightly iridescent rocks which climbed sharply in a curve over his head, forming a low roof and sides to this small underwater cavern, lit faintly by some reflecting light through the cave entrance which lay well below the surface of the sea.

Sammy waited, but he found it hard to judge the passage of time in the quiet stillness of the cave, and he began to grow afraid for no particular reason, for this time there was something strange, even wonderful about this cave, something which had not been so when he had found this retreat once before. He looked up and around, and gradually his fear left him as he became aware of the translucent beauty opening up around him; even the strip of sand on which he lay had taken on a muted light of its own, while the short tunnel by which he had entered was now quite dark, and no longer formed a passage through which any light entered the cave; yet still the small cavern shone gently, but never dazzled, fusing now with lightly glowing lines flowing so perfectly with the contours in the cave and the background of iridescence as to be far beyond the skills of any artist to reproduce.

Then, lifted by a wave of thought, Sammy's fear left him, and for a timeless moment he was in a state of perfect peace, but vibrantly alive. He saw Miralda, his mother, coming towards him, yet never touching, though her love and warmth reached out with such strength as to wrap him about in an inner calm; further, that these wonderful qualities were sent also for her mate, River Otter - and that is the only way that Sammy could describe it. He looked again, and saw that Miralda had appeared in two forms: the first was as she had been after her last terrible fight with the savage hounds, torn, ripped, bloodied and half crushed, an awful yet a wonderful sight; this image then merged into the second, a Miralda so perfect in form, colour and beauty, as to be in a risen state far above the bounds of Earth, a state of vibration which shone from her so brightly and clearly as to be a part of her immortal body.

Sammy wanted to go to her, but could not, for in a strange way she was already in his mind and speaking to him, speaking in thoughts, not in their normal words, communicating in spirit with an unforgettable clarity. What she communicated to Sammy in that wonderful undersea cave must stay largely locked in the hearts of River Otter and Sammy, but its soul must have been of love eternal for them both, for neither otter ever again grieved for Miralda. Yet there was more.

Miralda's presence withdrew, and once again Sammy looked about the under-sea cave to find that all was as it had been before. He sighed, and dived back into the pool to tell River Otter all about it; Miralda, the magic cave, everything - he would be so happy to know.

It was evening when Sammy rose to the surface of the sea, and there was no sign of River Otter at all, nothing in fact but a small unknown fisherman's boat coming towards him loaded with his day's catch of lobsters and fish. Sammy felt no fear for himself, only for River Otter who was not there, so he let the boat draw up alongside, and for the fisherman's hard but gentle hands to lift him out of the water and into the bottom of the boat between several barrels which held the fisherman's catch for that day.

After unloading the barrels, Sammy was taken to the Fisherman's cottage, some miles from that where River Otter waited; but he could not help noticing an air of excitement between the fisherman and his daughter. It meant little to Sammy at the time, as he did not know what was going on; all he really knew was that they were a kindly pair, the old and the young. They knew about the missing otter from their friends along the coast, so the daughter started up their old car and, taking Sammy with her, she drove the few miles to the couple where, quite unaware, River Otter was staying.

Apart from the pleasure between their fisherman and his friend's daughter, River Otter was temporarily stunned out of his mind with joy and relief. They talked until quite worn out, after which they very sensibly went to sleep together in the same basket. Both animals were full of thanks to these two kindly souls who had cared for River Otter for so long, even though they could not express their feelings in so many words - But the fisherman and his wife understood, and were happy they could help.

There is one final point which should be mentioned: from the day of Sammy's disappearance in the sea off Chichester, to the evening of his reappearance, almost into the hands of a strange fisherman, seven whole weeks had passed, forty nine days!

In due course both River Otter and Sammy were collected by Sonseeahray, the wise-man's daughter, who took them to their home in Africa, which had a wide field between the sea and a river. River Otter knew the wonderful man with the sea in his eyes who knew the world-wide language of all proper animals and birds, and who had a lovely wife of his own.

Along with several other animals they met Old Grey, a river otter like themselves, but who was old and too slow and blind to catch his own fish, and so was dependent on the understanding man's generosity for his daily fish; River Otter and Sammy took him over, and so relieved the household of a burden and an expense. The three of them loved to run across the field and swim in the river where, with the occasional nudging of a partially stunned fish, Old Grey managed again to catch some for himself, which boosted his flagging spirits and ego, and if he did occasionally suspect some help, he was a happier old otter with his new friends. There were no men and dogs hunting otters here, but there were a few crocodiles; These were easily spotted by River Otter and Sammy, but when these primitive creatures were around, Otter or Sammy quickly got Old Grey out of the river, as these creatures could move unexpectedly fast when charging their prey; at other times they lay like dead logs in waiting. . . So they all lived happily and at peace, with occasional additions to their numbers, under the care of the wise man with the sea in his eyes

THE SACRIFICE

Many years ago in the land of Minnesota, when the Indians still roamed the land, wild and free, there was born a young rabbit named Hlawehee; he was named Hlawehee because of his beauty with his soft golden-brown fur, lustrous eyes and delicate features: 'hlawehee', which means, 'wind whispering in the trees', for in those days true beauty was not mocked at, but admired and loved for its own sake.

Indeed, Hlawehee could hardly have grown up in a more beautiful part of the world, for the land was splendid with its green rolling hills, its fresh bubbling streams, its lakes and plains, and its wide woods deep and far with immense trees reaching up into the sky. The land scintillated with the spirit of life, with here and there a silver birch glistening and twinkling in the sunlight and crystal clear air, or a lake stirred into languid ripples in the summer breeze. This was indeed a veritable paradise, or, as the Indians and most creatures would have it, 'the land of Ishkoopurda, mighty Indian god'.

Here it was, deep in the great forest, and at the edge of a glade in the wood, that Hlawehee grew up. With his two brothers and a sister he learned woodcraft, and the names and habits of all the creatures with whom, in one way or another, he came into contact; there was Dingbarn, the owl, who with her curved beak, strong talons and wide round eyes, used to frighten him when he was little, especially at night when he who-whoood and swooped on silent wings. Then there was Salissa, the snake, who could slide coldly into warm burrows, and wait and wait his time.

But Mogolo, the eagle, was supremely dangerous, for he hung high in the sky, swaying slightly to the tropospheric winds, twitching his flight feathers only slightly to hold his position, and all the time his piercing yellow eyes were following every movement on the ground far below. Once Hlawehee had watched him from the edge of the great forest as Mogolo spotted some small animal: his wings closed, and his body turned into a feathered projectile which dropped towards the land with terrifying speed, so fast that Hlawehee was numbed and could not move, not even as Mogolo half opened his wings, razored talons outstretched, and then up and away with a limp body hanging.

But other than Mogolo and Salissa, and perhaps Dingbarn, Hlawehee had no enemies; indeed, his special friend was Pushita, the hedgehog, who grunted and snuffled his way along the ground, but who had a most kindly nature behind his small beady eyes and bristling coat of spikes. Hlawehee felt for his small friend because he was so slow on the ground, and whom he felt was lonely because of his citadel of needles, but who in fact was patient and wise and taught Hlawehee many things, and by no means only of the woods or of the land beyond, but often, too, matters of the mind; indeed it was through Pushita that Hlawehee learned sometimes to fear his beauty and good fortune, for it was Pushita who said, "To whom much is given, much is asked."

Hlawehee also learned that there was a great God, possibly the same as the Indians called Ishkoopurda, who made all the wonders around them, who made the rain to fall and the sun to shine, and who even permitted Mogolo to hunt and plummet from the sky to catch and carry off some slow or weakened creature, or Salissa to slide into warm burrows, or Dingbarn to hunt by night on silent wings.



There was Dingbarn the owl, who with
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"Who is this God?" Hlawehee asked; but Pushita did not know, and there the matter stood for many months; yet Hlawehee was not satisfied, and there grew within him a great urge to find this God, his God, Pushita's God, everyone's God; the God of the land and the lakes, the forests and the sky. From time to time for many hours Hlawehee sought the answer within his friend, Pushita - but Pushita did not know.

One day Hlawehee woke to a great need within himself, and he knew that he must find God whatever the consequences. He jumped up and out of his burrow to search for his friend, Pushita; at length he found him nuzzling at some ripened berries which had fallen to the ground. "Pushita," said Hlawehee excitedly, "come with me and let us journey through the great forest and over the hills and plains and seek God; let us ask every creature we meet, for surely one must know the answer and tell us where to go."

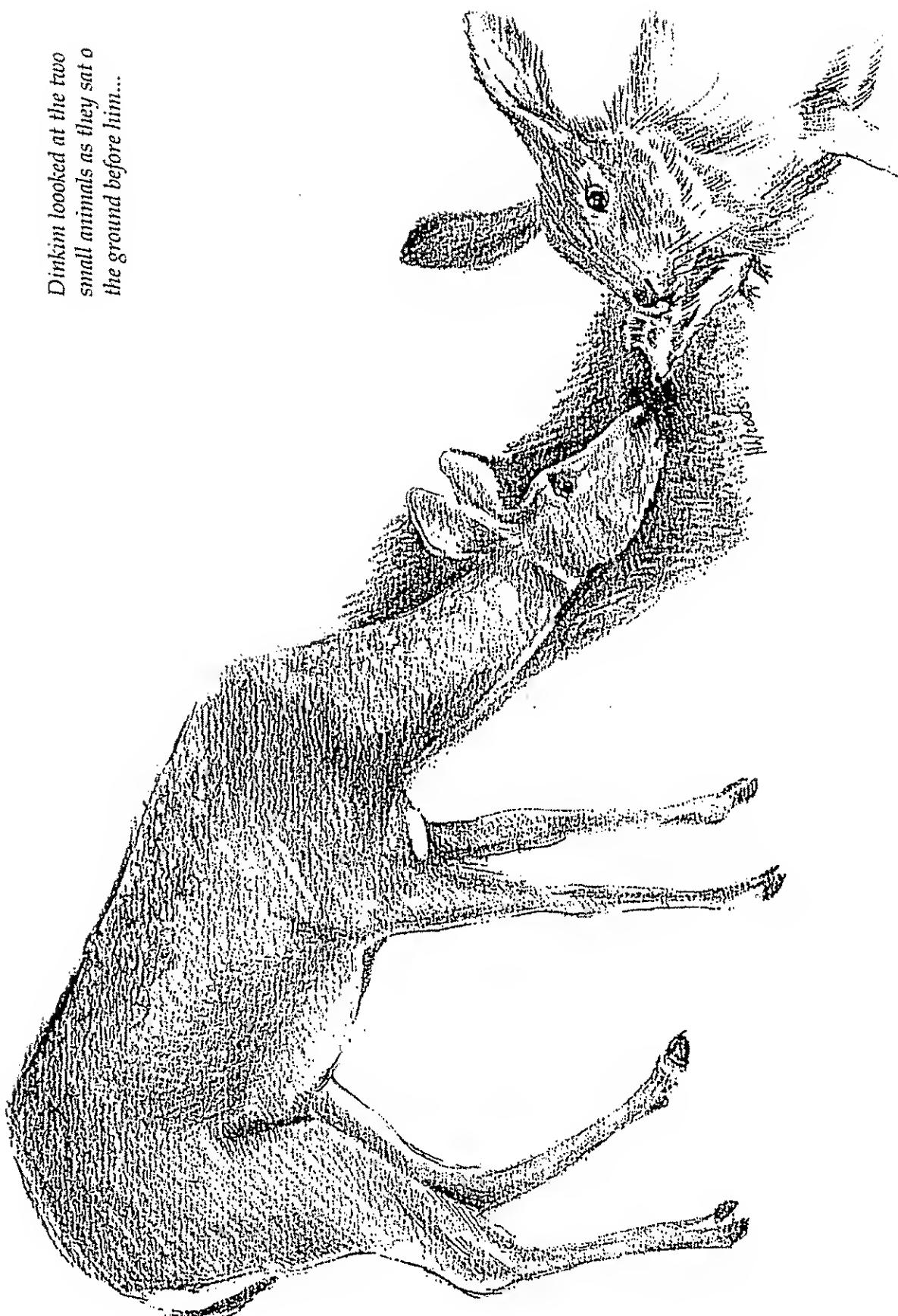
Pushita hummed and snuffled, and snuffled and hummed as was his way, for he never liked to make up his mind quickly on anything important; but eventually he agreed to come along, if only to look after his impetuous friend, for he was in fact very attached to Hlawehee, although on the matter of God he was less inclined to stretch the issue, but to leave Him where he was tucked in the back of his mind, an accepted but comfortable mystery.

Hlawehee was delighted; at last they were getting somewhere, and soon they would know everything there was to know. As Pushita bumbled along one of the forest paths, Hlawehee ran on ahead, and then behind, then all around his slower wheezing friend, trying to urge him to go faster - but in no way was this possible for Pushita who just trotted along, sniffing and nibbling unhurriedly on either side of the path, and once or twice during the day even curling up into a little ball of spikes and going to sleep: Pushita was not a fast mover, but he was steady and did not turn away from the goal they had set themselves, so Hlawehee just had to accept this modest pace.

The first animal they came upon was Dinkim, the deer, who stood ready for flight on delicate pointed hooves, his wet nose twitching and sniffing the air, and asked him in the woodland language, the language of plains and hills, of the sky and beneath the sky, even some in the waters; "Tell me, Dinkim, who is God? Where is He, and how can we find him?"

Dinkim looked at the two small animals as they sat on the ground before them; his eyes were soft and dewey, and for a while he seemed to avoid the question, but he thought and thought, and scratched behind his left ear with a front hoof as though he was the only animal in that part of the forest; but when he looked down, both Hlawehee and Pushita were still there, waiting patiently for his answer. "God!" he said at last rather petulantly; "why God is in the wind, of course, for how else could I smell all that is going on. Breathe in the air and you will find God." At that point the subject either ceased to interest Dinkim, or he was embarrassed at being asked something he plainly did not know, for in a single sideways flash of spotted fawn, he bounded away into the woods and was gone.

*Dinkin looked at the two
small animals as they sat on
the ground before him...*



Hlawehee and Pushita looked at each other, and Pushita shook his head and said, "Dinkim's pretty enough, but he is neither clever nor wise; how could he possibly know who God is, or how to find Him: his mind is like that of a butterfly. But come, let us look for Galutu, the badger, for he is wise; surely, if the answer's to be found, he'll know." Hlawehee agreed, so on they hopped and trotted; but in fact Galutu was very hard to find, and it would not be for many days before they finally came upon him under tragic circumstances.

Meanwhile the odd couple travelled on at a more leisurely pace, for they now realised that the answers to their questions would not be easily found. During that first day the came upon only two more creatures who would listen to their questions; the first was Terila, the squirrel - he listened quite patiently, for it so happened that he was busy washing his face when Pushita found him sitting on a branch over their heads. But having heard the questions, and having completed his ablutions, Terila squirmed in apparent anger, for he was an impatient and short-tempered fellow, and told them both that he thought their questions stupid: "Who cares if there's a God or where He is; if He's anywhere, He's in the trees. What stupid questions!" At that point Terila began to chir furiously and threw twigs, and even some of his nuts at the two animals below; but he was very small, and his missiles quite harmless to the two friends below, who turned and went away.

A little later, but without much hope of success, they came across Chiawu, the sparrow, thrusting his beak into the dead leaves that lay about the bole of a great tree, and asked him the same questions, but put very simply, for Chiawu was a bird of little brain; however, at least he was polite and concentrated as long as he could, which was not very long, and answered, "Why worry yourselves about such foolish questions; life is short," he chirped, "and food is not always plentiful. What has God to do with my daily hunt for food?" And away he flew.

For several days, nobody would listen to them or to their questions; but on the fifth day they came through the forest and on to the open land and lakes. Both of them were rather afraid of these big wide spaces, but Hlawehee was determined to go on, and Pushita was too loyal to leave his friend. They called up into the sky where Mogolo flew and swayed high above, for from such a question in the common language of the woods, or plains and hills, of lakes and the sky, they knew that Mogolo must answer and come in peace. They saw Mogolo fold his wings and dive with terrific speed down to the ground, down to where Hlawehee and Pushita crouched together trembling; but Mogolo was a master in the air, and in the last moments he spread his wings wider and wider in a graceful curve, to land with a push of air in front of Hlawehee and Pushita. "Why have you called me down in the tongue?" Mogolo demanded haughtily; "be careful that you do not anger me," and he clashed his sharp hooked beak.

"Oh, Mogolo," said Hlawehee, plucking up his courage, "you must be wise, for you fly so high and see so much, day after day and moon after moon; pray tell us who is God, and where can He be found?"

Mogolo dipped his great head and thought a while before he answered. "Your questions are good, and often I have wondered the same as I fly high and yet higher, until even my great wings will not grip the air. But God; I'm not sure; He is not in the air, for I command the air; perhaps He is in the sun, for the sun is always beyond my reach, though I can look into the sun, and the sun can look into me." Mogolo paused, and

looked at the two small animals at his feet; "that is the best answer I can give, for though I can see all that is on the ground, I cannot always reach all that is in the sky. Seek out Dingbarn, the owl, for he has some wisdom; or Hawa, the goose, for he travels far; or even Fishka, the heron, for he sees into the waters where I cannot see. But there is one you would be wise not to ask, and that is Salissa, the snake, for while he may have guile and cunning, yet he is evil, and will not respect the common language known by all proper creatures of the woods, of plains and hills, of waters and the sky."

Mogolo looked sternly at the two animals. "Call me no more, for by the lore you may call me only once in peace; if you call me again it may not be in peace." With these parting words, Mogolo spread and drove his great wings and rose heavily but gracefully off the ground. Hlawehee and Pushita watched him as he circled higher and higher into the eye of the sun, until they were blinded by its light. Both were sure that Mogolo was not right, but he had thought, and Mogolo was wise; above all he knew the presence of a god who was greater and more powerful than himself, Hlawehee and Pushita were heartened. They knew that in spite of Mogolo's stern words they had no more to fear from that great bird.

Hlawehee sat up on his haunches to peer as far as he could see over and through the tops of the grasses; away in the distance he saw the broad glint of water; he told Pushita, and they knew that there they would be likely to find Fishka the heron, and with good fortune, Hawa the goose. They set off, and for the rest of that day they let no creature distract them from their goal; thus they let Miskim, the field mice, pass by as they chattered and scampered in the long grass. Once, too, they caught sight of Nishma, the mongoose, but they hurried on after one look into his fierce red eyes, for Nishma could have killed either of them with speed and ease, and would have had no compunction in doing so, nor did they feel that with his sinuous body and red eyes that he would know nothing of God, nor wish to know: Mogolo was fierce, but Mogolo had stature, while Nishma had none.

That night they slept in the nook of the bole of a sturdy tree, with the lake perhaps two miles ahead of them, and in spite of the exposure to which they were unused, both little animals were so tired that they scarcely stirred until the dawning sun broke upon them. Other than to nibble at some juicy plants, they only stopped once when they met Ludongo, the tortoise, plodding his slow but steady way back towards the great forest. This time it was Pushita who asked the questions, and Ludongo was quite happy to stop a while to consider the matter, for he was tired, and time was of little consequence to him. He rested his shell on the ground and withdrew his head a little: "God, yes I have sometimes thought about God," he said in his slow way, "but although I have lived a long time I can neither see far nor move quickly, so it is hard for me to learn much, only that which is down and in front of me; but I believe there is God, but how to find Him, or where, I could not say; you must seek elsewhere, for He would have to stoop so far down to me." And with that Ludongo withdrew his head and went to sleep, tired by the unusual exercise of having to think for long, and of plodding slowly back to the great forest.

Hlawehee and Pushita were not disappointed, for at least Ludongo, who was known as being very slow and short-sighted, knew that somewhere there was a God. Politely, they hopped and trotted around him as he snoozed in



Hlawaheee humbly put their
questions to Fishika...

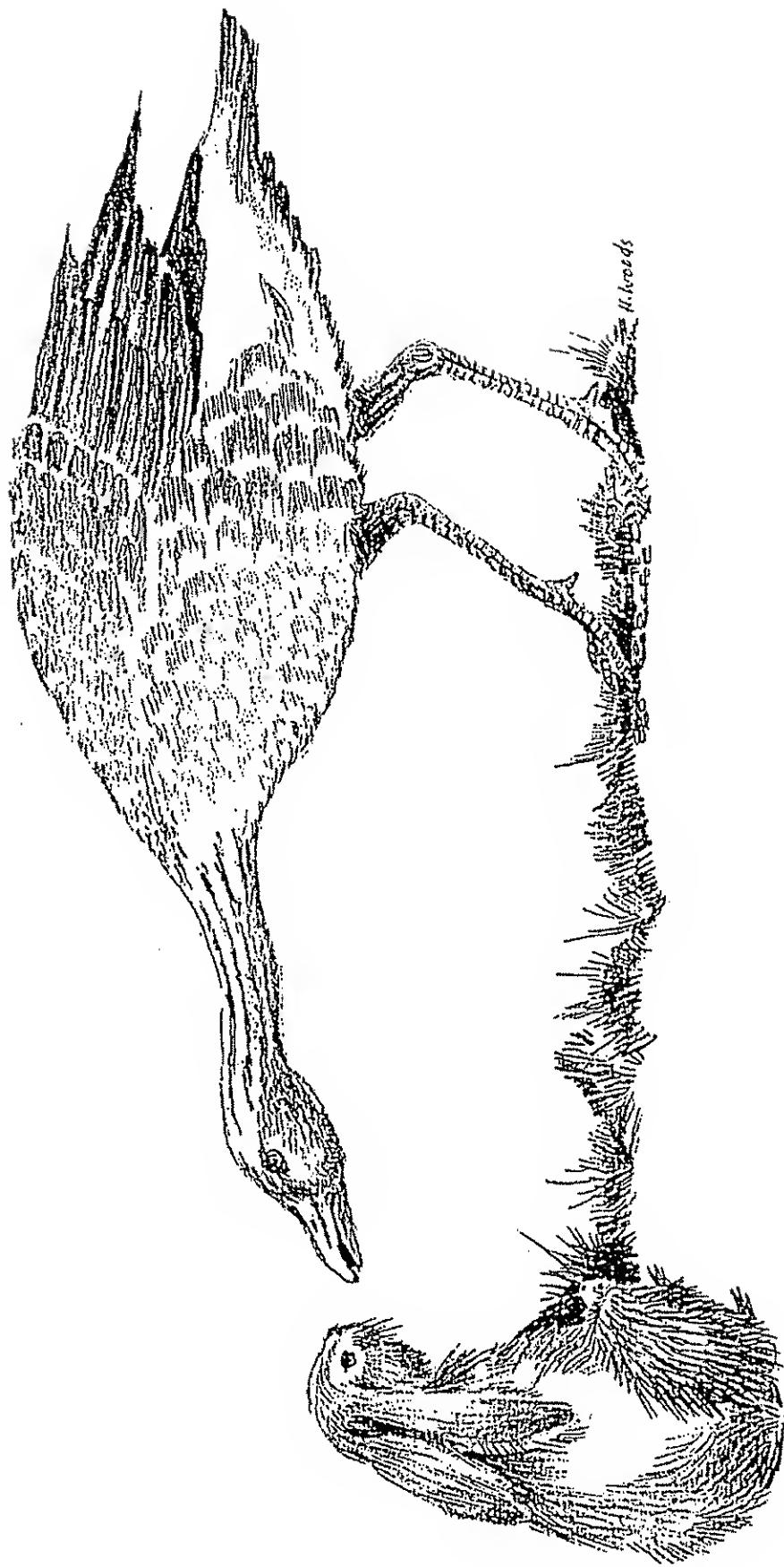
the middle of the path, and so on to the lake, which was now quite close. By midday they were standing on its shore in the hot sun, and in the far distance they could see Fishka, the heron; they called his name in the common language of the woods, of the plains and hills, of the waters and the sky; the language of truth, as no proper creature could lie in this tongue, nor could they pretend to what they did not know; also they had to hearken to the summons, for to refuse would be to break the lore which bound all God's creatures together in one way or another; excepting only Salissa, the snake, and all reptiles, suspect of breaking the code, but everyone knew that Salissa had no honour. Fishka heard them, and slowly he stretched his wings and flew towards Hlawehee and Pushita with languid beats, settling with an easy grace on the narrow beach near the two animals. Fishka peered down his long beak at them. "What is it that you want?" he asked in his high slightly bubbling voice; "you have called me from my fishing, so there had better be a good reason."

Hlawehee humbly put their questions to Fishka, while Pushita nodded away. "Hmm," said Fishka, and then was silent for a while as he nibbled at a foot. They were patient, for they knew he had to answer. Then Fishka looked up again, and Hlawehee wondered at his long neck, and the grace with which he moved. "God - yes, God is certainly in the waters, for He allows me all the fish I can eat; also there is a grace and beauty to the waters which I have never seen on the land; it moves, it's never still, and it has a timeless life; I'll never grow tired of gazing into the waters, for they're strange and mysterious. It is good that you asked this question, for in its very answering I am now sure that God is in the waters; but how to find Him exactly I cannot say; I must think about it, and I must go back to my lake with its fish, to the moving currents and the leaning reeds; I must go back:" after which Fishka slowly flapped his heavy wings and took off the ground, briefly casting a shadow over the two small animals as they looked up to see him wing his graceful way back to his beloved lake.

It was Pushita who voiced the thought in both their minds when he said to Hlawehee, "Fishka is good and noble, but Fishka lives only for his lakes, so cannot see anything beyond the effects; he cannot see the cause." Hlawehee did not consider himself as wise as Pushita, nor could he have explained so well what was in his own mind, but he knew that Pushita was right.

The two animals hopped and trotted along the shores of the great lake, all the time searching the sky for a sight of Hawa, the goose. All that day they sought in vain, and it was only as the sun was dropping towards the horizon in a globe of flaming red tendrils that they heard Hawa honking high above. They called his name in the mystery language, the language which could only be used on special occasions, and generally only once to most creatures, great or small. At first Hawa did not hear them, so they called again and again, together with one voice; but Hawa had heard them, though not at first; he then came swerving down on short strong wings to land by the two animals as they waited. "Why do you call me from the sky while on my sacred evening call?" he asked angrily.

Hlawehee hopped a short pace forward towards the strong sturdy bird, and said, "Oh, Hawa, pray listen to us and answer our questions, for with little satisfaction have we already sought the wisdom of Mogolo the eagle and Fishka the heron, and others on the way; their answers had wisdom, but they did not hold what we seek, for they were limited to what they



*"Why do you call me from the sky while I am on
me sacred evening call? he asked angrily*

saw or felt through themselves and their lives. We seek to know of God, of who He is and where He can be found; you have travelled far, and must have seen much and gained knowledge." It was the longest question that Hlawehee had ever made, and he felt quite embarrassed at his nerve; but the driving force in him to find God and to know Him was growing impatient and gave him a fluency he did not normally possess.

"Your question is a very difficult one," replied Hawa after a while, quite mollified by the praise he had received, "but I doubt I can answer fully to your satisfaction. I feel the presence of God in the wild winds over the great seas, or in the white-whipped flecks of the waves, or in the freedom of movement and the struggle for survival against a storm, and even in exhaustion the fear of death; but of who He is, or what He is, or where He can be found, I cannot say. I think perhaps," said Hawa thoughtfully, "that we are not meant to know, but rather to live life to its fullest. That is all I have to say; I must go." And Hawa went, fast and strong, into the setting sun.

"Hawa is the wisest we have yet met," said Pushita.

"Yes," agreed Hlawehee, but he has the feeling without the knowledge, for I think we're meant to seek for God, and to understand all we can.

The darkness was setting in quite quickly now, and their conversation was cut short as the two animals scrambled up the bank to look for the shelter of a tree where they could sleep, for this was tiring work, and once again they were quite worn out with the strains and excitements of the day; yet both agreed that they were close to finding fuller answers to their questions.

For the next two days they journeyed back up the gentle grassland slope to the great forest which they had left, for both felt that somehow their natural homeland had the final answers, but to these they were becoming a little afraid. On the way they met Salissa, the snake, whom they tried to avoid, but Salissa was quick and blocked their path while rearing high over their heads as they crouched in fear. Then, to their surprise, Salissa hissed and spoke to them in the common language that cannot carry a lie, save from Salissa's own forked tongue. "My spirit tells me that you have been looking for God." Salissa paused, swaying beguilingly, he even tried to smile through his stone-cold eyes. "You need search no more," he said, "for I know the answers to your questions; would you hear them?"

Both Hlawehee and Pushita were very frightened, for Salissa was not only long and tall as he reared above them, but they felt he had knowledge and power, more knowledge even than Hawa, more power even than Mogolo; but they also felt that his knowledge and power were evil, or at least that they did not want to know or feel them. Nonetheless, both animals nodded warily from fear, so Salissa spoke on. "Knowledge and power lie within me, and these I can give you if you will follow my words and do as I say," said Salissa, still swaying beguilingly, so that poor Hlawehee was becoming hypnotised and drained of will; but Pushita, who had more experience, turned slightly away, and so was not captured by Salissa.

"Then," said Pushita cleverly, "if you have all knowledge and power, who are you?"

"I am God!" replied Salissa.

"Then, if you are God," replied Pushita, "you have power over the wind and the rain, over birds and all of us animals; you are almighty and cannot be harmed, and you must know all things."

"All that is true," Salissa said smugly.

"Then why is it that you crawl on your belly and have no legs or wings like the rest of us?" asked Pushita cunningly.

Salissa hissed angrily and swayed menacingly - "Because I must!" he spst; "it is a mystery; ask me no more. Do you accept my words and live, or will you die?"

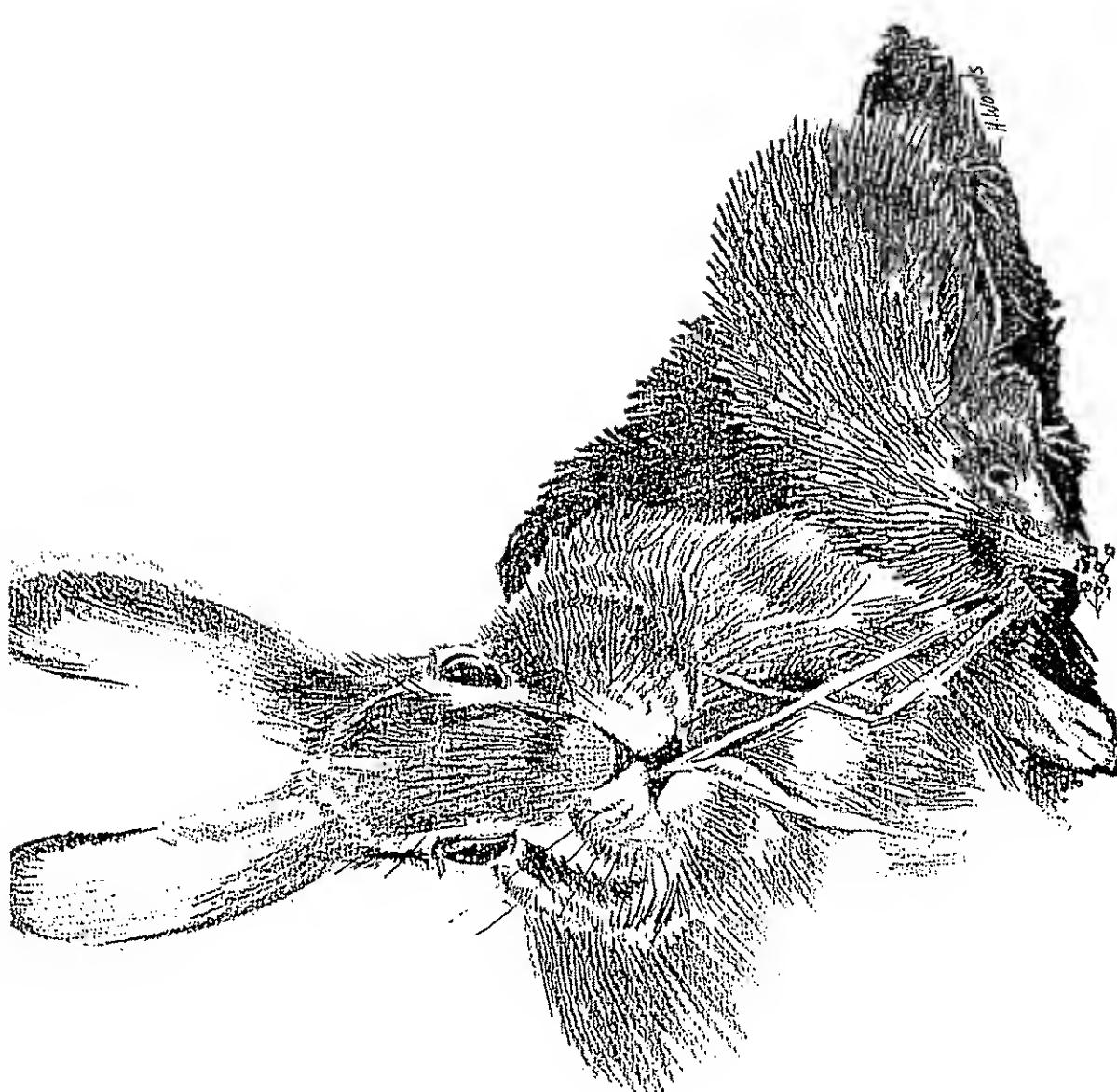
Pushita was actually quite frightened, but his dear friend, Hlawehee, was helpless under Salissa's hypnotic spell. There was only one thing to do: slowly, as in a bemused state, Pushita stepped closer to Salissa as though in a state of subjection; then, when he was only a few inches away, he bunched his little muscles and darted in to bite Salissa's body as hard as he could. The bite was quick and deep, and Salissa was hurt quite badly as his blood flowed on to the ground, and in his shock and surprise he paused a fraction of a moment before whirling round to strike at the hedgehog who had committed this terrible sacrilege on his person; but Pushita had already rolled himself up into a tight ball of needle-sharp spikes, so all Salissa got was a deeply injected head and throat and even more pain; too late he remembered that a rolled-up hedgehog was inviolate to him. He hissed in savage agony, collapsed, and slid off into the long grass, leaving a thin red trail of blood, which was the last they saw of Salissa the god.

The hypnotic power that Salissa had exerted over Hlawehee was broken with Pushita's bite; but even so Hlawehee had been very terrified of Salissa - for he had no citadel of spikes, and was quite defenceless against the snake's bite and venom - that he crouched low to the ground, his eyes bulging, while Pushita drove Salissa off.

"You are very brave, Pushita," said Hlawehee admiringly; "I could never have done what you did."

"My dear friend," replied Pushita soothingly, "you forget that I am a hedgehog, and when I'm curled up no snake can bite me, or only at their peril, as Salissa himself found. Also you forget that I am older than you with more experience, and I know that you must never look into Salissa's eyes or he will hypnotise you with his evil power. Salissa is not God, but he does have a lot of sstanic power; I don't yet know why or how, but he just has. But you are brave too; look how you spoke up to both Mogolo and to Nawa, either of whom could have killed you with ease. Besides, there's nothing wrong wit being afraid; the animal who knows no fear is a fool. Come, let us go back to the grest forest and seek Dingbarn, the owl, and Galutu, the badger, for I feel as you do that our answer is close upon us."

In fact both animals were now trembling from shock, nevertheless they made their way onward along the lightly worn trail leading to the great forest, anxious to get away from the place where they had met Salissa. They had no more unfortunate adventures, and late on the second day they



*... the whole of the next morning Hlave-
hee and Pushita sent together nibbling
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hopped and trotted tiredly into the great forest, and fell asleep in the first welcoming hole they found.

The whole of the next morning Hlawehee and Pushita spent together nibbling their well-known foods, and resting often. Then, as the afternoon wore on, they started slowly, wandering deeper into the great forest. They did not expect to meet either Dingbarn or Galutu that day, indeed they were not even looking, but simply making their way back to that part of the forest which they knew so well, and from which point they could continue their search.

However, life's affairs so often fail to fall into the patterns that are even loosely planned, and so it was that in the late afternoon Hlawehee and Pushita came into a glade in the great forest, and there before them on a strong low branch perched Dingbarn, the owl, and in the fading light Dingbarn's eyes were round and large as he looked across the small glade at the two animals. Hlawehee and Pushita stopped briefly and looked up at Dingbarn, then quickly at each other. Together they hopped and walked forward to within a few paces of Dingbarn's branch.

Hlawehee then spoke in the common language of the woods, of the plains and hills and of the water and the sky, the language in which no animal or bird, save only Salissa and his kind, could lie. "Oh, Dingbarn, you are known to be wise and to have great knowledge in that head of yours; tell us if you can the answer to these questions: Who is God, and where can we find Him?"

Dingbarn looked down at the two small animals as they sat on the leaf mould below him. He looked with wide gleaming eyes and an air of pompous wisdom, but he did not answer; indeed, he even raised his head, looked into the distance for a while, then closed his eyes as if he had gone to sleep. Hlawehee and Pushita were bewildered, and looked at each other, not knowing what to do. They waited a while before Hlawehee turned back to Dingbarn and tentatively repeated the question; but this time woke with a snap, and turned to the two little animals. "I heard you quite plainly the first time," he clacked crossly, "but I needed time to think." He paused again.

"You know," said Dingbarn rather acidly, "if you two only knew better, you'd know that no answer should be given without due thought and care. I'm a philosopher, and I think a lot; at least you have been sensible in coming to me with this problem, for I have thought about this matter," and Dingbarn puffed up his feathers importantly, while Hlawehee and Pushita looked at each other, and sighed quietly.

"I have long since come to the conclusion that there is no God; that we have all originally developed from the amoeba, a one-celled life form made of a naked mass of protoplasm constantly changing shape. You've heard of Darwin, of course," said Dingbarn, now almost oblivious of the two small animals below; "well, to a large extent I go along with Darwinism, being the biological doctrine respecting the origin of species derived by descent, with variations of course, adaptions to circumstances and surroundings. . . ."

Dingbarn was the ultimate in conceited intellectual bores, and he would probably have wandered on into a labyrinth of biological and nonsensical philosophical tripe for half-an-hour or so; but Hlawehee and Pushita had

no wish to listen any more to his pompous drivel, so with meaningful looks between them, they quietly slipped away into the forest and went their way, with the dwindling monotone of Dingbarn's voice clacking away in the distance. That night they slept in an unused rabbit warren, which was rather musty, but at least it was dry and warm. They knew they had only Galutu to seek, but they also felt still more strongly that the true end to their mission lay ahead.

After they had woken the next morning, they scrambled out of the dusty warren, before settling down to a good wash and clean-up, after which they moved on slowly deeper into the great forest, stopping from time to time to eat. They both expected to have some difficulty in finding Galutu, for they had seen no sign of him on their way to the plains and lakes; but in fact, perhaps because they were not expecting to find him so easily, they came on him snuffling for grubs among some dead leaves.

The two animals went straight up to him, and in the ancient language of the woods, the plains and hills, and of the waters and the sky, spoken by all proper creatures great and small on special occasions which, with the exception of Salissa and all reptiles - cannot be spoken with a lie. Hlawehee said, "Oh, Galutu, we have searched far and wide seeking answers to two questions; we have spoken to many animals and birds, both here in the great forest, and beyond where lie the plains and hills and a great lake; we have had many answers, some foolish, some wise, but none can answer our two questions truly and fully; which are, 'who is God, and where can we find Him?' Mogolo, the eagle, can see into the sun, and thinks that perhaps God is in the sun. Fishka, the heron, sees God as a mystery in the waters and in the beauty of movement in the waters. Hawa, the goose, sees God in the wildness of the great seas, and even in the struggle for survival, and the fear of death. We feel; that Hawa's thoughts are the wisest, but even he is limited since he feels without knowing. As for Salissa, he lied and said that he was God, or he did so until brave Pushita bit him hard and he slid away in blood and shame.

"Tell us, Galutu, who is God and where can He be found?" Hlawehee asked.

Galutu was very handsome with his black and white striped face, and he looked at the two small questioning animals before him. He smiled at them and spoke, "Each animal and bird you spoke to, for you say that there were others, sees God either as a reflection of himself or of his life-style; even with Salissa this is true to an extent, for he played an ignoble part in the birth of life by turning traitor. Likewise in part with the other three you spoke about, although in varying levels of wisdom. Mogolo flies high every day and feels that he can command all things, all except for the sun which he cannot reach, so he thinks that God must be in the sun, which he sees but does not understand.

Fishka spends most of his life looking into the lake, from which he feeds; he is more advanced than Mogolo, for he sees beauty in the moving moving water; but he cannot understand this beauty, so he thinks that God is in the lake.

Hawa's sight is further still, probably because he travels far, so he not only sees God in the wind-lashed waters of the great seas, but also in the struggle for survival, and even in death itself. You are right, Hawa is the wisest you have met."

"But what do you think, Galutu?" asked Pushita.

"They are all right, but only to a limited degree, the limits set by themselves. In fact God is everywhere and in everything that He creates.

"But how can we find God?" asked Hlawehee.

"Little friends, you have already found him, for in your long search for God, and in the courage that you have both shown to travel so far, He has found you; and when you both know this, then truly you will have found Him, replied Galutu.

"My head is spinning," said Hlawehee. "You mean that we have searched so far only to find that God has been in us and with us all the time?"

"That is correct," Galutu replied; but the search and the struggle, even pain and sacrifice are nearly always essential ingredients."

"Oh, Galutu, you are clever and wise, and yet simple, beyond all other creatures!" Pushita exclaimed.

"Some wisdom perhaps, because I am simple and therefore think without twists and corners; but clever, no, not as Dingbarn is, but Dingbarn outwits himself by thinking that there is nothing cleverer or greater than himself. Do you both understand?" asked Galutu.

Both the little animals nodded vigorously, and Galutu smiled on them again as they thanked him from the fullness of their hearts. Then Galutu spoke again, but in a different note

"Before you go, little friends, there is a word of warning: As you have both accepted what I said from the truth in your hearts, and if you follow the word of God within you, then you will find even in this seemingly innocent part of the world that you will be persecuted in one way or another; you may even be called on to make some big sacrifice, for such is the way to God. To live in His way is necessary, but to do so is to find much of the world against you, and it will often stop at nothing to vent its hatred. Remember Salissa, the murderer who lies!"

Both Hlawehee and Pushita had noticed an air of deep loss about Galutu, and then, too, he seemed to be terribly tired, terribly tired, and much older than he had at first appeared.

"Come, look into my cave," said Galutu, "it is only a short distance; follow me." With that he turned and walked heavily towards his home, with Hlawehee and Pushita following silently with some trepidation.

Galutu's cave lay between two great boulders, and at its entrance he stood aside and pointed in with one paw. "Look," he said, because I love God, look upon the handiwork of one of my enemies; his voice choked, and he was silent. "Come, look into what was my home," said Galutu, "it is a just here; follow me." With that he turned and walked heavily into his home, while Hlawehee and Pushita followed silently, bearing with them a part of Galutu's crushing sorrow.

In awe and some fear, Hlawehee and Pushita went into the cave, and there, in the dim light, they could see clearly enough four bodies:

Galutu's wife, and lying close by her three baby badgers - though how they had died was not immediately apparent. Hlawahee and Pushita withdrew to where Galutu waited outside.

"Who has done this terrible deed?" asked Pushita; "can we not punish whoever it is?"

"No, I know that Salissa is responsible for these murders yesterday afternoon, his fang marks are in each of the bodies. They are gone and lost to me for a while; vengeance is forbidden, and cannot bring them back; that also you must accept as being God's way. Come, you must go, for it is getting late."

"But can we not help you at all?" pleaded Hlawehee.

"No, my little friend, there is nothing you can do for me; tonight I will sleep out here on the grass and brush, and tomorrow morning I shall fill in the cave, so that my wife and babies will lie where they lived.

Hlawehee and Pushita turned away sadly, sorely shocked, for they loved the gentle Galutu and felt for him deeply in his terrible losses and sorrow. Hlawehee turned back and tried once more. "At least can we not come and see you sometimes, and we can talk about God?"

"Of course you can," Galutu replied; "you are both always welcome; but I don't think I shall be here long; I don't know why, for I am not very old, but I think that God is calling me at last, and I am quite ready to go to Him. Now go, my good little friends."

And so they went, but they turned before re-entering the woods and looked back at Galutu, who stood heart-broken next to his cave, his eyes sparkling with tears. Pushita's paw took Hlawehee's, and the scene passed from their eyes as they went their way under the forest canopy.

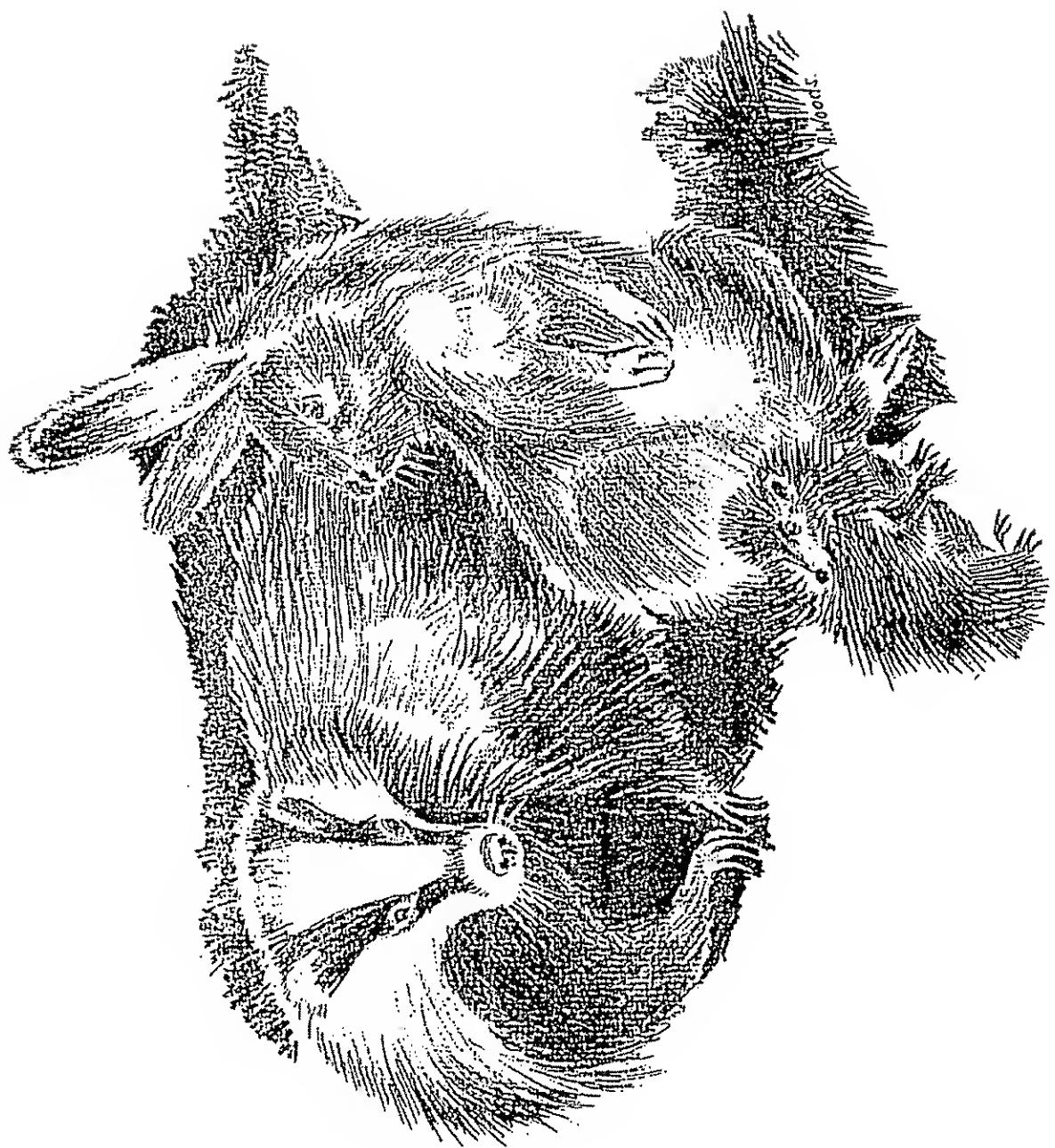
"We have found God, but we found great sorrow too," said Hlawehee: but I cannot let go because of this, for I now feel God's presence in me as I never have before, and there is a peace and magic in it."

Pushita said nothing, but his eyes were filled with tears, for he felt and knew the same as his friend.

Hlawehee and Pushita returned to their glade in the great forest, both very different from when they had left not so long ago. They found their glade and the life around it to be very much as it was before, and they found, too, that their absence had scarcely been noticed, that life had been following its old routine of eat, sleep, love and death. They felt very much out of place in this pool of stagnant peace; they tried to talk to the other animals and birds about their experiences and even more wonderful discoveries: but only vague interest or outright boredom met their efforts; then even that stage passed, and they found they had no friends, and that some animals would play hurtful nasty tricks on them, or snigger behind their backs.

Hlawehee and Pushita remembered the wise words of Galutu, and were patient; even so they could see little purpose in their lives as they

*Hawehée and Pushita turned sadly
away, for they loved the gentle Galuh...*



were living at present, for their persecution achieved nothing, indeed indeed the deeds and words against them were becoming worse and their lives more intolerable and pointless. So one morning they set off to see Galutu, who was a day's journey away, to seek his advice. Early in the morning they hopped and trotted along the forest path, but not too early for some of their tormentors to hurl insults and missiles at them. Hlawehee and Pushita knew they were now, in effect, nomads, who did not accept the many pagan woodland sprites, and so could not return to their own homes again where they had become so hated for their belief in, and love of God.

The day wore on, the weather was hot and dry, for their had been no rain now for many weeks. There was a stillness hanging in the air which in a strange way did not bode well; even the leaves from the trees and bushes hung listlessly without any breeze to stir them, while the leaf mould underfoot was not springy and soft as it should be. In their own glade which they had now left neither of them had paid much notice to these ominous change, this dehydration of the forest; but now that they were once again out and together, and no longer being harried from dawn's first light to dusk, their keen senses were again actively alive, and twinges of apprehension flickered across their minds: something was not right, but they both felt that this something was not born of nature, but from some external force.

By mid-afternoon, the two animals had reached Galutu's own cave, but all was quiet, and when they looked they found it had been filled in, just as Galutu said it would be, while all around the grass and earth had been trodden flat by pad prints, but there was no sign of Galutu himself. The two small animals looked about them, and were about to call his name when Hlawehee spotted a small sprigs of freshly picked wild flowers, all carefully tied together with blades of grass.

"Pushita, look! Here, and here, all around the cave are bunches of dead and dried flowers. Do you think as I do?"

"That Galutu is still near here; every day he must have been laying bunches of flowers around the entrance to his cave, and this bunch is quite fresh, so he must be near by, for in this dry air they could not last long," said Pushita.

They raised their voices and together called 'Galutu', but there was no reply. They called again and again, and then heard faintly what they thought was a muffled grunt some distance away. Apprehensively, the two friends crossed Galutu's glade to where the sound had seemed to come. With a clutch of horror as they neared the belt of trees, they caught sight of him lying on the ground, hunched in pain, clutching in one paw a few fresh flowers he had picked, while others he had dropped lay scattered around him. Hlawehee and Pushita ran to him as he lay on the dry earth, but Galutu seemed to be partially paralysed and was gasping for breath. They tried to ease his position to make him as comfortable as possible, while the two grief-stricken animals stroked Galutu's handsome black and white forehead as he lay on his bed of pain.

Gradually Galutu grew quieter and more able to relax, save for terrible wrenching spasms which sporadically shot through his body from his chest; but he was also becoming weaker, and it was shockingly plain to both

Hlawehee and Pushita that their dear friend and saviour was dying. There was nothing they could do to stop it, for they could see no wound on his body, and could only to give him what little comfort they could.

Then Galutu's eyes opened, to see two very anxious and tearful little faces peering into his fading sight, two familiar faces, loved faces.

"My little friends," he said weakly, his voice faint and slow, trying to smile, but the smile was twisted because he was so paralysed, "you find me in a sorry state, soon to leave you." His voice wandered - "It was good of you both to seek me out; now I am not alone at the end."

"Galutu," wrenched Hlawehee in agony; "why are you leaving us? What is wrong? We can see no wound.

"Salissa bit me in the chest while I slept. He gasped as another awful spasm shook his body before he could go on, but more weakly and slowly; indeed both Hlawehee and Pushita could now see the fang bites. "Salissa's bite is death sooner or later; I know it; but do not grieve for me, my gentle friends, for I knew it would come somehow, as indeed I told you before." Then there was quite a long pause while Galutu drew on his remaining strength. Then when he spoke again his voice was stronger, like the last flickers of a dying candle. "I see it now, dear friends; we will not be parted long; this very day we - will - be - together." His last words were struggled as he fought against the agony in his chest: then his noble black and white head rolled to one side, and he was gone.

Hlawehee and Pushita were grief stricken, and they wept copiously, for they dearly loved Galutu, their wise and gentle friend; they loved his pure goodness and Godliness, and the struggling pathos with which he had died nearly broke their hearts. Galutu's last words did not mean much to them at the time, but a little later they would be remembered as their strength and faith were tested. Dumbly, through their tears, they gathered up all the little scattered flowers that Galutu had picked; these they did their best to make into a sweet-smelling posy, which they laid on Galutu's chest. Then they moved back a little and crouched on the ground together, each with his inner thoughts and burdens.

A short while passed, and Pushita, who had the keener nose, sniffed the air. "Fire, Hlawehee! There is a great fire coming this way; we must flee from its flames; we can do no more here for Galutu."

Hlawehee, too, sniffed the air and smelt the smoke; but more than this, they both felt the stirring of an unnatural wind, a hot dry wind that had not yet centred over them, but which seemed to be far away with the fire. For the first time that day they heard the rustle of dry leaf mould as it was stirred hither and thither, played with fitfully by the wind, then dropped to lie awhile.

"I cannot leave this glade, Pushita, for I feel the spirit of God in me telling me to stay, though I cannot say why; but you go, my dear friend; go and save your life, for we will meet again when all this is over, said Hlawehee compassionately.

But Pushita shook his little head stubbornly. "Where you go, I go; and if you stay, I stay. Together we started out to seek for God, and

here with Galutu we found Him, so if need be, together we will end."

Hlawehee did not reply, but nuzzled his little friend, for he knew only too well the depths of Pushata's courage and unfaltering loyalty. "So be it," he said softly.

The swathe of fire drew closer, and in the distance the could hear the roar of flames and the sharp cracks of bursting trees. It appeared that the fire was encircling Galutu's glade, which was higher than most of the forest, so the trees and vegetation on and around it thinner as the soil itself had less depth and could not support great roots. If they were to leave it would have to be now before the horns of the fire met together.

Then came the first of many animals and birds, large and small, for only Mogolo, Hawa and Fishka had the power to lift themselves above the swirling winds and smoke, and the offsetting down-draughts of air that fed the furious fire. Hlawehee and Pushata left the twisted body of Galutu as it lay with its already crinkling posy of flowers, and moved back to the edge of the glade where they sat together and waited.

The patter and slither of feet continued as many panic-stricken creatures came to this temporary island within the great fire, while over their heads flew many birds, striving hopelessly to rise above the hot blasts of air that blew first one way and then another. There even was Dingbarn, his eyes wide and afraid in the fading light as the brightness of the day was being smothered by the dimming smoke-filled air; he could have made it to freedom earlier, but in his smugness he had left it too late, now his low-flying habit of hunting on silent wings from tree to tree, or tree to ground within the forest itself, did not leave him with the ability or strength to rise above the fury of the fire.

At length as many creatures which had survived the fire in this part of the great forest were gathered together in the glade, while the encircling flames drew closer and closer; even the little birds were exhausted, and flew about wildly no more, but lay exhausted on the ground, many with their wings outstretched for coolness. All about Hlawehee and Pushata the creatures gathered, but now they did not mock, but chattered wildly to each other, while Hlawehee and Pushata were silent; in their chatter they caught the words of, "Ishkoopurda, mighty Indian god," and suchlike about this god's wrath. Then they were silent for a while, for they had seen the sinuous form of Salissa, and whenever 'Ishkoopurda's name came up, Salissa was there with his forked tongue flickering in and out.

Then Hlawehee felt within him the moving of his spirit, and he hopped forward, and with him was Pushata, and raised his little voice above the clamour. At once there was silence, save for the roar and crackling of the fire, for many of the creatures who had taunted them before now looked oddly at these two animals, who waited quietly, unafraid and in peace; now they looked at these two and hoped for some revelation that would save them.

"To all our companions of the woods, listen to me now," spoke Hlawehee, and although the crowd about him was great, yet his words were clear to every animal and bird in that glade.

"Do not listen to Salissa, for he speaks with forked tongue, and his words are lies. There is no such god as Ishkoopurda, and Salissa cannot prove it to you. There is only one true God of whom I speak, God the creator of all things, of yourselves, of the woods and plains, of the hills and waters, of the rain and the sky. Had you listened to the voice within yourselves, the voice of truth, you would have known, and you would not have been punished with this great fire."

Salissa raised his head to object, but an angry glare from Dingbarn who stood next to him, and a look at that sharp curved beak, and Salissa sank back to the ground.

The true and only God will make you free, for He created and loves you all. Galutu knew and loved the true God, and Galutu was wise; now he lies dead yonder through the venomous bite of his enemy, Salissa, the voice of Ishkoopurda, as he also poisoned his wife and three cubs. Why is this?" and it seemed as though Hlawehee's little voice rang around the glade, like a spear into the hearts of his listeners. "Because Salissa loves a lie, and being the father of lies he hates the truth."

The fire was very close now, so that some of the angry flames were even licking at the edge of the glade. There was not much time, for the air was hot like an oven, and so de-oxygenated that most of the creatures before them were panting desperately for breath.

Hlawehee was inspired, and seemed untouched by the smoke-filled air, and went on. "Do you wish to be saved from this fire? If you do, will you believe in the true God, and cast aside Ishkoopurda and his servants? Will you strive to live in love and peace for evermore?"

All the animals and birds before Hlawehee and Pushita either nodded vigorously or waved their paws in agreement; only Salissa made no move, but his stone-cold eyes spat hate.

"Then," said Hlawehee, for it was very difficult even to speak now in the hot waves of billowing smoke, and above the crackling of the blazing inferno, "a sacrifice is called for, even as it was many moons ago when the Son of God walked upon this Earth. . . I will go to God through the flames and ask Him to still this raging inferno."

Pushita, who up to now had remained silent, for the inspired words had poured only from Hlawehee's mouth, was now alarmed that he would lose his friend, so spoke quickly - "And I, too; we cannot ever be parted!"

Hlawehee turned to him, and in the light from the fire his rich brown fur seemed to glow as burnished gold, but his eyes as always were soft, gentle and loving. "Come then, dear friend; we will go together."

So together they went, paw held in paw, while the crowded animals and birds moved back from the heat to give them a path through their midst. They hopped and trotted to the edge of the glade, almost to the raging fire itself, while all about them fell burning branches and glowing embers. Hlawehee and Pushita turned once and looked back, each bravely waving a paw to the crowd of forest animals and birds who looked on them with awe. Then the pair vanished into the billowing smoke and flames, and were seen no more.

For a moment there were only the awful sounds from the great fire, then even these died away as the wind dropped, and only the flames sped upwards in an eerie silence. The animals and birds wondered greatly at these marvels, for at the same time the air about them became sweet and fresh and cool, in spite of the trees and brush that burned without a sound.

And then the wind came, blowing downwards in a mighty blast, fanning the flames away from the glade; and with the wind, and following the wind, came a vast blaze of lightning that reached across the sky with a deafening crash of thunder, followed by rain, but rain that fell so heavily that no animal had ever known a deluge such as this. In fear and trembling all the creatures crouched closely together, friend and foe alike, until they were as one; and there they stayed until the rain had stopped, and the fires were completely quenched.

After the rain, the animals and birds rose from their drenching, rejuvenated and fresh with life. They never forgot Hlawehee's words, nor his and Pushita's noble sacrifices for their sakes. They left quietly in twos and threes, all touched by the spirit and power of God until the glade was empty . . . Empty? No, not quite, for at one edge of the glade lay the partly burnt body of the noble Galutu, while in the filled-in cave were the bodies of his dead wife and three cubs. Yet wait, there was something more, for near the centre of the glade lay what looked like a twisted piece of dark rope: the torn body of Salissa, quite dead. Perhaps Dingbarn knows how and why, for he was quite a wise bird; also his beak had been bloodied and wet when he had left,

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Characters in this Legend

[Hlawehee - The rabbit.]
[Pushita - The hedgehog.]

Ishkoopunda - Mighty Indian god.
Salissa - The (serpent).

Galutu - The badger.
Mogolo - The eagle.
Fishka - The Heron.
Hawa - The goose.
Dingbarn - The owl.
Ludongo - The tortoise.
Terila - The squirrel.
Chiwau - The sparrow.
Miskim - The field-mouse.
Nishma - The mongoose.

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Together with his wife, an unusual looking man with the blue of the sea in his eyes were walking past a Parish Church in Johannesburg during the week some time in the 1960s; they were depressed by the giant metropolis around them wishing they never had to come there, even for a week; then in a rather grubby nook at a far corner of the Church, they beheld one of the most pathetic sights they had ever seen:

There, leaning against the wall was a brown rabbit with some grey fur about his face and forehead, showing that he was either no longer young, or had been under some great stress so some time; but now he was in a state of mental collapse, sobbing his poor broken heart out, while on the ground around him were scattered an assortment of quite small bottles, some empty or broken, others with a variety of mixtures in them, a torn plastic bag and a broken orange-coloured medicine spoon. The scene was one of utter dejection, of an outcast, and that of a poor broken heart.

It was fortunate that nobody else had seen this weeping rabbit, for that nook was not so far from the bustling street; but people hurried on their ways uncaring, their minds fixed only on their own material cares. In a few moments the man and his wife had nipped into the Church grounds, and round to the nook where these wretched rabbit wept out his soulful grief; in fact the rabbit was so utterly distressed that he showed no fear of the couple coming towards him, indeed he did not appear to care what happened to him.

Comforting him as best he could, the man wasted no further time in a place where someone else might come and lay claim to this poor animal, but picked him up gently, while his wife gathered up the bottles and managed to get them into the torn plastic bag so that they could be carried; then, in a moment of inspiration, she put the broken plastic medicine spoon into the rabbit's right paw, which he hung on to as though it was his only remaining sheet-anchor to his life. After this they made their way out of the Church grounds, along the noisy traffic-ridden road until they could catch a bus that took them most of the way to their daughter's shared-student lodgings, a compact solidly built tin-roofed house, set back from the main road in safety, quiet and reasonable seclusion.

Here they, and their daughter, Sonseeahray, when she had the time, cared patiently and lovingly for this exceptionally gentle and broken-hearted rabbit, brown but with mottle of greying fur in his face. They had only three days left before returning to their home not far from the sea and a river, between which lay large area of wild grassland, rich with many types of plants and flowers.

Early on during this convalescent period, the three of them went through the heart-sick rabbit's various bottles to try and find some clue as to who he was, and where he'd come from. It was fairly obvious that each bottle (mainly plastic to save on weight) contained a modest variety of herbal medicines of one sort or another, got from county plants or roots; but on no bottle was there any indication as to its contents, nor what any particular medicine was used for; in fact, with the exception of one, the bottles had no labels on them at all, although no two bottles were the same shape. This one bottle, however, was interesting as it had originated from some pharmacy, and although the label on it was torn, enough of it remained to read 'B-4-tis' (a cough mixture). There being no other evidence, it was decided to call their new friend, 'B-4-tis'; at least until he recovered

sufficiently to recall his own name.

A week passed, during which time B-4-tis was fast on the road to recovery. Meanwhile the man and his wife with B-4-tis had returned to their home near the coast; there he met several other animals: there was Scutterford, another rabbit; Garibaldi, a lone hare who had been first rescued by Sonseeahray while they were in England; three river otters, and a few others. It was at this stage that the wise man with the blue of the sea in his eyes decided to talk to B-4-tis in the little used language known and inborn into every proper animal and bird, but excluding all insects and those that crawled on their bellies. He was a rare man to have been able to learn and converse in this simple language; it is a gift given to few, and neither his wife nor Sonseeahray had been able master the tongue.

B-4-tis was delighted at being able to converse with the man especially, this made him feel even more at ease with both of them. All of their extended family loved him completely from the first, for he was not only a good but simple doctor rabbit, but he was very gentle and spoke often of Great Grey Overbuns; furthermore his funny bustling ways and concerned busy manner in whatever he was doing went straight to the hearts of the man and his wife, and from them to the slowly growing number of animals.

Much of B-4-tis' memory came back to him sharply and clearly, although there were patches here and there which had been partially or completely erased from his mind; probably just as well in some instances, for it was suspected that these blank pages hid particularly painful episodes in his harrowing life, and even some happier ones that had become partially smothered, but which might now prove to be bitter-sweet memories.

During this time all of his six or seven bottles were replaced by small plastic bottles of different shapes which could not break, and were much less noisy when carried; they also found a new orange-coloured medicine spoon, as near in shape and size as his broken original, which B-4-tis told the man had been given to him by his father.

Gradually, over a period of several evenings, B-4-tis' story was drawn out and pieced together. One odd lapse in his memory was that of his own name; the shocking events which he had lived through in the south of England, the awful responsibilities and painful choices, the troubles and losses that came later, had at some time driven even his own name out of his poor head: in fact it did not matter, since B-4-tis was only too happy to be able to forget his painful past, and to accept his new name of B-4-tis, and in his gentle way he was very proud of it because of its medical linkage; indeed he remembered that particular bottle, the only one with any label on it, as being an especially good medicine for droopy ears and the sniffles, which he had made up from a certain root mixed with the plant's leaves.

What follows is as much of B-4-tis' story as could be drawn from him and pieced together, so we will part the thin veil of time to around 1963/64:

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B-4-tis was a doctor rabbit, married with two baby bunnies, who had been brought up in the woods near Forest Side on the extreme western border of Sussex. Other rabbits with their families used to live in the same warren from time to time, and all around in the woods, and in the surrounding countryside were several more populated warrens.



...he could never withhold that final third spoon...

That is, there had been until the great plague of myxamatosis swept through that part of the country, crippling, blinding, and always finally killing off nearly all of the rabbits as far away as B-4-tis knew.

B-4-tis did what he could, and from early morning to dusk, with barely time to nibble any food for himself, he used to bustle out of his burrow with his bag of bottles of herbal medicines and his invaluable medicine spoon, and seek out his sick and dying patients. Of course B-4-tis knew nothing about myxamatosis itself, nor how this death-dealing disease came about which none of his simple remedies could cure, or make any impression on this terribly ravaging disease. These hopeless facts he quickly learned, and so it came to be that he sought out, and found, a certain root which when pounded up, mixed with water and boiled became a most potent soporific; one medicine spoon would ease pain for a while and make any rabbit drowsy, two spoons would have an even stronger effect and his patient would fall asleep in about five or ten minutes; but three spoons - and this was the awful nightmare to B-4-tis - would turn sleep into death.

B-4-tis had to make this awful decision many times a day, and every day, until it became no decision at all, for stricken rabbits would beg him to give them that third and final spoon, and all of them, even baby rabbits, had seen the tortured bodies of their sorely sick and smitten friends and relatives, unable even to utter any audible sound for help, since the disease itself had a contracting and throttling effect.

But B-4-tis rarely hesitated; he was a clever rabbit, and he had been brought up with an unshakeable belief in Great Grey Overbuns, and one of the twelve commandments from Great Grey Overbuns, "You must not kill." B-4-tis knew this very well; but he also knew the higher commandment, to "Love your neighbour as yourself": Now any proper rabbit should be neighbour to any rabbit in need, and as he, above all rabbits in that part of the country, knew that this most frightful disease which blinded and throttled rabbits remorselessly to death in ditches, drains, or scattered in fields, was a truly terrible death to die; so B-4-tis with his gentle heart could not bear to see such suffering amongst his fellow rabbits, and so could never withhold that final third spoon when so desperately needed of this most potent soporific mixture, which he knew would be fatal, but which he also knew would send his patients in painless peace to Great Grey Overbuns.

B-4-tis tortured himself with these thoughts of his daily deeds. He prayed constantly to Great Grey Overbuns for guidance, but none came, and he was thrown back on to his own conscience and judgment. He gathered together several still healthy rabbits, a few from his own warren, and even his own wife when she could be spared from looking after their two babies; but their numbers were pathetically few. Some he employed in finding and fetching his discovery of the special soporific root herb, while others pounded it up before mixing it with boiling water - neither too much nor too little; B-4-tis had to watch closely this critical preparation of the soporific mixture to see that nothing went wrong; but all the time his willing helpers were lessening in numbers as they fell sick themselves of this dread disease, and had to take the third and final spoon.

Then, and quite unexpectedly, he was joined by a new rabbit, Thumperford, who had already suffered greatly in a hot and steamy country far away, where he was caught and half-starved on old and cast-off vegetables by the owner of a shop by the name of Abijoudi; his captivity ceased only when he became so ill and weak that he was thrown on to a rubbish dump nearby, his services

as a draw to customers had been criticised by too many who had seen him collapse, thin to emaciation in his weakness. They had little time between work and snatched sleep to discuss much of what followed, but apparently he had been rescued by two girls who had seen him being flung out early one morning, fortunately before the scavenging jackals could find him and tear what remained of his thin body to pieces. . . B-4-tis never learned how Thumperford survived afterwards, nor how he must have been cared for by either or both of these girls, nor how he came to have been sent to England to be released in the woods at Forest Side: it was a mystery, but one for which B-4-tis was supremely grateful, for he knew that all such mysteries came from the mind of Great Grey Overbuns.

Every morning B-4-tis would go out with one or two responsible helper rabbits and seek out his patient; alas, these were never very hard to find, and to each one who had the dreaded disease B-4-tis would give three spoons full of his potent soporific mixture, and to each he told a short story of Great Grey Overbuns while holding his patient's paw in his, and although very few of his patient's could answer because of the throttling disease, and many could no longer even see, yet they all loved him for his goodness and mercy, and B-4-tis would never leave any patient until he was sure that he, or she, was in the arms of Great Grey Overbuns. Meanwhile Thumperford proved to be a most willing and intelligent helper, so for the time being B-4-tis was relieved to leave him in sole charge of finding the right root, and of its proceeding thereafter.

So sped those dark days, and although B-4-tis was still quite a young rabbit, it was noticeable that the previously rich brown fur on his face and forehead was becoming speckled with grey; he was also losing condition and weight, yet he always kept his gentle nature and his complete trust in Great Grey Overbuns, although she never gave him any direct guidance. Then one morning he saw that his wife had caught the dread disease, soon followed by one rapidly growing baby, and then the other: he knew only too well there was no cure, and that without his soporific mixture only a terrible death awaited them; there was no alternative option, so to all three in turn he gave the three medicine spoons full of his potent soporific mixture.

It was from this point that B-4-tis' courageous spirit was in danger of breaking, and may have done so had it not been for Thumperford's own warm support in these darkest of dark times; even so, much as he had come to love and rely on his new friend, B-4-tis was never quite the same: he was more withdrawn and uncertain, more conscious of fear and loneliness.

B-4-tis had been grievously hurt by the role that he was having to play during the run of this dread plague, and now even more by the intimate loss of his own little family. Sometimes he looked wistfully at his bottle of potent soporific mixture, and wish too that he could go to Great Grey Overbuns; but always there was another call on his help, another rabbit here or there in distress in need of his medicine and comforting words.

Then it was that B-4-tis was struck by a simple but brilliant idea - Hares never caught this disease! he had spoken to one recently. It was from this meeting that a saving idea began to germinate in his tired mind; now he was sure that it was their only saving grace. Hares did not live in burrows, nor did they live closely together like rabbits; they lived in the open. The remaining rabbits must split up until this fatal disease had completely run its course; they must try and live as nearly as possible like hares; they could come quite close to one another, but they must never actually

touch - perhaps for a period of one whole moon, or even two, by which time the disease should have passed over them and gone. It would be very hard for them, for by nature rabbits are gregarious animals who find security and comfort in being with each other; but it had to be done if they were not to be wiped out altogether.

B-4-tis called a meeting with his few remaining helpers, and told them about his plan in detail; after they had fully grasped what he had in mind, he sent them out in all directions to pass this message on to every living rabbit they could find. Alas, there were not so many left, but those they found so loved and trusted B-4-tis that his message was readily passed on and on until, as B-4-tis believes, it went far beyond his normally known boundaries, even to regions he had never been, and perhaps further still to the length and breadth of the country! Strange indeed as this may seem, such a message as B-4-tis sent could have had far-reaching results, for the plague of myxomatosis disappeared from the country about two months later.

Some of these positive results, at least around the area he used to treat the sick rabbits, must stand to Thumperford's credit, for he knew just how smitten and exhausted B-4-tis had become from giving so much of himself for so many, capped by the loss of his own little family, that he insisted on remaining so as to oversee and encourage all the rabbits they knew to keep to B-4-tis' wise but strong advice for a moon or two.

From this milestone B-4-tis' work became less and less; every day he would trudge out of his burrow, alone now, but with his spoon and bottle of potent soporific medicine, and would hop around as much of the countryside as he could cover, occasionally meeting a few healthy rabbits, but less and less often coming across any fatally sick animals. He realised that this flash of inspiration, which had doubtless come from Great Grey Overbuns herself, to scatter the rabbits for a moon or two, was actually working, although by this time at least four-fifths of their originally happy colonies had already died. B-4-tis was now very lonely; his own warren, which had been used to the squeaks and chatter, patter and thumps of several rabbits, now lay empty save only for himself, and it became so that his services were scarcely needed any more - and then not at all.

B-4-tis became increasingly afraid and tense, though of what and why he could not fathom. Then he woke up one morning to the deathly hush around him, and knew that he could not remain in his own warren any longer; he must go far, far away; though where to, or how far? He had no idea, for the boundaries of his life had always been fairly restricted. He took some of his more important medicines and his spoon, but not his potent soporific mixture, for something told him that he would have no further need of it; he then packed what he had in his little bag. Having no other possessions in the world, only his spoon and his medicines, B-4-tis was now ready to leave. He looked about him once, at the soft fur down on which he and his wife had lain together, sighed deeply, then slowly made his way up and out of his own burrow and warren.

B-4-tis did not know which way to go; he was mentally and emotionally worn out, and perhaps for the first time in his rabbit life he let go of his doctor mind and let instinct from Great Grey Overbuns guide him where she would, which was eastwards. He hopped and loped on unhurriedly, resting and eating when he grew tired or hungry; but all the time he was in a bemused and semi-trance-like state, and has no memory of meeting any other rabbits at all! The country was alive; but there was something vital missing in

the apparently bewildering absence of any rabbits other than himself; this preyed on B-4-tis' already bruised mind as he travelled on day after day, ever eastwards; it was as though he was in the company of the pale ghost of death, which claimed others, yet which strangely never sought to claim B-4-tis himself.

Some time during the afternoon of the third or fourth day, B-4-tis came upon a brown-robed man seated on a boulder. The man sat quite still and quiet in the warm sunshine as he and B-4-tis looked at each other for what seemed to be a long time; B-4-tis was drawn to him, for his vibrations were light and beautiful.

Here the lapse in B-4-tis' memory is too scattered to tell his story from his own scattered account; however, save for some minor details, there is sufficient substance to fill in most of the gaps; so, to continue: the man in the brown robe turned out to be a Franciscan Brother, a man who, like his patron, Saint Francis, had a great feeling and love for God's creatures. He befriended the lonely rabbit and took him in. To B-4-tis this was a period of warmth and security, a period during which he could shed his own awesome burdens which had been weighing so heavily on his sensitive mind. However, this period was also quite short, since this good man of God was shortly to be moved to a Parish in Johannesburg in the hope that the altitude would ease, or even cure, his flagging health.

The Franciscan Brother took B-4-tis with him when he flew from Heathrow, and B-4-tis remembers something of the flight itself, terrified at first of the tremendous noise and raw power of the four huge jet engines, then later sitting on the Brother's lap for much of the way with the comforting rough texture of his brown robe, and holding on to his spoon and his bag with its few herbal medicines. He remembers, too, snatches during the bus journey from the Airport to the Johannesburg Terminus, and all along the chatter of people, and of being afraid in the general melee and noise. . . . Then, for some undefinable reason, B-4-tis' memory was crystal clear from this point; perhaps - certainly through no fault of the kindly Franciscan Brother - there began, slowly at first, the premonition of a further period of loneliness and pain at this Parish (which had never been Franciscan), but very different from that which lay behind him.

The terrible thought that grew in B-4-tis' mind was the idea that he was being punished for his potent soporific mixture, and the three full spoons that he and Thumperford had given to so many sick and dying rabbits to save them from further hopeless suffering, and to send each of them into the warm embrace of Great Grey Overbuns.

When the Franciscan Brother arrived at the Parish Church he was given only a small room for himself, his few possessions and for B-4-tis: the Brother was very firm that B-4-tis should live with him. The room itself was dank and dismal, more like a prison cell with only one quite narrow window high up, almost too high for the Brother to reach, but the gentle Brother never complained.

Sometimes, though not very often, when the Brother had the free time after doing whatever work he had been given, this strange couple used to potter about the limited Church grounds and hunt for leaves or roots which could be used for herbal medicines of one sort or another; in fact B-4-tis built up a small stock of mixtures which, often together, they had prepared and put into separate bottles. There were not many of them as B-4-tis'

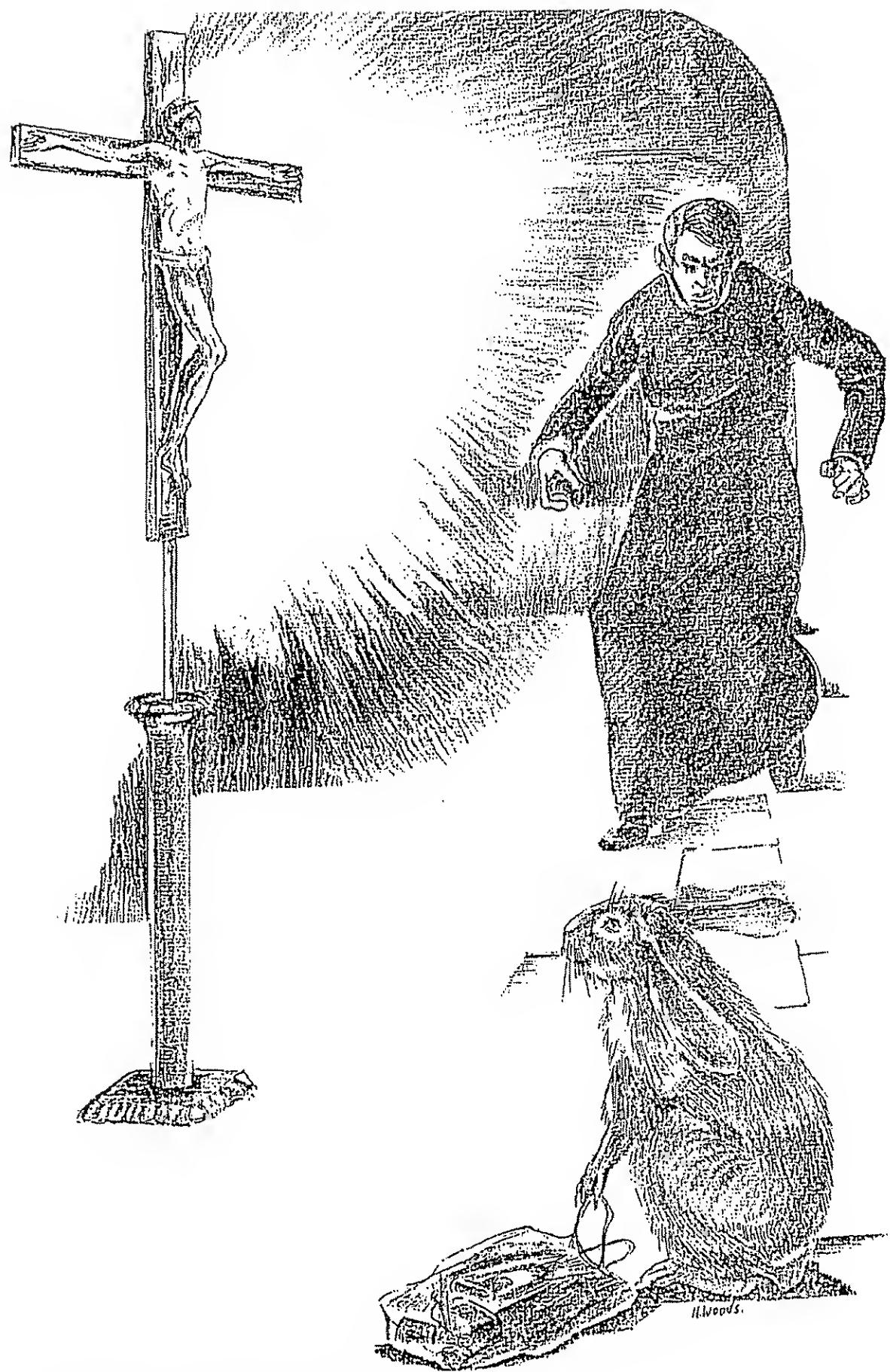
knowledge of herbal remedies had previously been confined to the woods and country around his old warren in West Sussex, and the modest variety of plants in the limited area of the Church grounds were mostly new to him and comparatively few in number.

During this time, which could not have been more than a few weeks, B-4-tis became painfully aware of two major disturbing facts, both of which were advancing rapidly and coming to a head: the first was that his friend and protector, the Franciscan Brother, was stricken with a mortal disease, from time to time coughing blood, and weakening daily: he knew this disease well enough, for it was one that occasionally struck rabbits who lived in close proximity to each other. The second was that neither of the two priests living in the Parish itself actually wanted him around at all, and it had been due to the almost constant presence of his friend that had saved B-4-tis from kicks and blows from one particular priest, or even from being turned out to fend for himself in a crowded city fit only for humans.

The Franciscan Brother was slipping away fast, until one day he was too weak to leave his cell. A doctor came and went frequently, and during his visits B-4-tis used to hide under the bed. Afterwards he came out and hopped up on to the bed to try his best to comfort his friend; it was all the poor little fellow could do, for he knew that his own herbal medicines were too simple and poor to help. The Franciscan was almost certainly fully aware of the situation with B-4-tis, but equally so he was unable to do much more than to fondle B-4-tis' ears to show his love, and occasionally to talk to him when he had the strength and the pain was not too great; B-4-tis remembers quite clearly how much his friend used to suffer, unless he was in a pain-killing drug induced stupor, and how daily he grew weaker.

One night, while B-4-tis was sleeping restlessly at the foot of the bed, he was suddenly jerked awake, conscious of his friend's wraith, which hung for a while over his body before being drawn away like wood-smoke in a light breeze. B-4-tis did not even go up to the body of the Franciscan Brother: he knew that his friend was dead to the World, and gone beyond what little help or comfort any mere rabbit would have been able to give. B-4-tis slipped off the bed and shrank into a corner of the room, his bottles and his medicine spoon next to him, and looked towards the still form that humped the bed, perceptible even in the gloom of the cell, and he was very afraid. Now, yet again, the memories and fears which resulted from the great myxomatosis plague, along with the awful role that he had been called on to play, came crowding back into his sensitive mind, and he shivered and shrank yet further back into his corner. B-4-tis tried to pray to Great Grey Overbuns, but no answer came to him through the long cold night; the grey spectre of death hung heavily over him; death, so much death, and always it seemed to those he loved.

At last the dawn broke, and soon after the door opened to the touch of the Parish priest, who quickly took in the scene. Thereafter, people came and went, the doctor first, then others who took away the body of his friend, leaving the cell door ajar while B-4-tis still crouched in his corner, unnoticed or uncared for by all who had come and gone. Whatever was to happen, B-4-tis knew that he must leave that dank and dismal place which was now quite empty; this had been a friendship that B-4-tis knew inwardly could not last long: it had somehow been too insubstantial, too unreal - B-4-tis' mind was temporarily lost in the 'why', but he had known. He picked up his old medicine spoon in one paw and the bag with its bottles in the other, and hopped out of the room. He did not know what to do nor where



..suddenly and briefly in that moment the cross with the figure seemed to glow...

to go, only that his poor brain was terribly bemused, and that he must get out of the building and into the fresh air and daylight.

In his stunned state B-4-tis must have lost his way, for the next thing he knew was that he was crossing inside the Church in front of the altar, his bottles clanking slightly as he loped slowly along in near paralytic fear. The pews were about half-full of people, but the service itself had not yet begun. There was a murmur from the congregation, and then a titter, and B-4-tis began to panic. What was he to do? He stopped close to a large table covered from end to end, and nearly to the floor, with a snow-white cloth. There was no place to hide there. Then he looked to one side of the table, and let his eyes be drawn up a tall pole, on the top of which was a Cross on which hung the cruelly disfigured body of a man cast in wood or plaster. Then, briefly in that moment, the figure on the Cross seemed to glow, and at the same time all about him B-4-tis became vividly aware of the close presence of Great Grey Overbuns, and the words, "Soon, just a little longer," flooded through his rabbit mind. Then the moment was over as he felt himself being picked up, swiftly but not urgently, by a youth in a long white robe, and carried unceremoniously past the table with the white cloth, and through a door into a large room.

Here he was held up and shown to the bearded priest who hated him so, while nearby were two or three boys in shorter white robes. Words were spoken, and the bearded priest's eyes narrowed. "Here, give it to me; I'll put it outside until after Mass." Meanwhile the priest smiled for the benefit of those around him, but B-4-tis knew well the man's black heart, and not just because of the cruel hand that fiercely gripped the loose skin on his back, while the other yanked his head back by the ears.

The bearded priest swirled towards a door at the far end of the room, carrying B-4-tis who still held on to his precious spoon and his bag of herbal medicines. They were outside and the door was closed behind them. Now, briefly, this terrifying priest was alone with B-4-tis, and for a short while his cruel violence was given some freedom of rein. Savagely he swung B-4-tis by his ears only, and held him up to his bearded face, glaring at the wretched rabbit, who was in considerable pain and paralysed with fear. "Get out of this place, and never let me see you again," he hissed through almost clenched teeth, "and take your rubbish with you." The priest grabbed at the plastic bag with the few bottles of herbal medicines in it, and threw them on to the grass several paces away.

"And whst's this?" snatching at B-4-tis' other paw in which he still clutched his beloved spoon. The spoon was torn from B-4-tis' weak grasp, and then he felt himself flying through the air, to land heavily on his back near his torn bag and bottles of herbal mixtures.

B-4-tis was quite badly hurt, but instinctively he scrambled to his feet and looked pleadingly up at the bearded priest. For a few fleeting moments the two, man and animal, looked into each others eyes and depths, and the man knew what B-4-tis wanted more than anything else at that moment. Thoughts chased across the priest's face, and for a moment there was even a tinge of mercy there; but then his expression darkened, and his powerful fingers clenched on the spoon, so that it snapped in half, and the bowl of it was cracked open, which pieces he threw after B-4-tis. Then he turned back into the room, the door opening and closing behind him - oh, ever so gently!



"Get out of this place, and never let me see you again."

B-4-tis stood stunned in the Church grounds outside the door; his world had collapsed; it was only a plastic spoon, but it had been his for as long as he could remember, and before then it had been his father's. Moving in a daze, he hopped and limped over to where the pieces of the shattered spoon lay on the ground, and picked up the pieces. Then, quite slowly and quite methodically, he gathered up his unbroken bottles and put them into the plastic bag that his good friend, the Franciscan Brother, had found for him, noticing dully that it was now ripped all down one side so that it could no longer hold his few bottles, nor be carried. When this was done, oblivious to the thunder of traffic close by, B-4-tis made his way to the corner of the Church to wait, dragging with him his bag of unbroken bottles in one paw and holding the remnants of his broken spoon in the other; here he leant back into a small recess and waited - and waited.

As B-4-tie waited, Great Grey Overbun's word came back to him, "Soon, just a little longer." But, "Soon", he thought, and for what? And how long was, "just a little longer"? But it was the shattered spoon that finally broke B-4-tis: he looked at it, and thought of all the rabbits who had tasted death from that spoon, no matter that they had been suffering terribly, and dying anyway, blind, stifled and utterly helpless, nor that he had saved so many from increasing agony, and that they had died blessing him as they went to Great Grey Overbuns.

His paws opened, and his torn plastic bag with his few remaining bottles of herbal medicines chinked and clattered to the ground, and with them went his precious broken spoon. And then the tears welled up from his poor broken heart, as he sobbed and thought that he was nobody and nothing, and that all his work had been for nothing.

It was then that the far-seeing man and his wife found B-4-tis and took him home with them.

Later, while B-4-tis was recovering, and after a new plastic spoon had been found for him, and when the past was seen more clearly as both a sad and wonderful richness in his life and memory, he was sitting on his special friend's knee, with his wife opposite, and the man with the blue of the sea in his eyes was stroking the high-domed grey-furred forehead with great love and compassion, when these words drifted unbidden into his mind as he looked down at B-4-tis: "A Heavenly artist will draw on the fabric of life, but there are those who will stand and scoff;" at the same time there appeared to be the hint of a golden glow which haloed the greying face and head of the tired and peaceful rabbit.

And they bore these signs in their hearts, and thought deeply on them.

GARIBALDI.

Garibaldi and his sister were born in the middle north of England, on the highland saddle of the country not far from Nottingham. From the first theirs was a bleak life on the often wild windy slopes; by day there was sometimes warmth from the Sun, but by night the only warmth that Garibaldi and his sister knew were their own close-furred coats, their close contact with each other and, though less frequently as they grew, their mother's strong body, lean and fast as befits a fine hare.

Of their father they saw little, for he never came near his two offspring; but he was large, strong and long-limbed, a veteran of many a hunt, and wily in the ways of evasive tactics and concealment; indeed, a local farmer and sportsman had been after him for the past two or three years, but without success, for he could outstrip any of the hounds, knew every inch of the country around, and virtually every dodge and trick. Even so, or perhaps because of it, Garibaldi and his sister were taught to be constantly wary and alert, for men and dogs were dangerous, and it needed only one slip, one bad mistake.

Thus Garibaldi's days were hard, of often moving forms, of seeing both his mother and father sometimes leap high in the air several times to sight the country around for signs of danger, of him and his nervous sister being cuffed by their mother to move on quickly at any given moment, or of long hours lying quite still together while their mother was away. It was a life of exposure and frequent danger, of being so continually on the alert that their nerves were strung high and their reactions became ever quicker.

Time passed, and Garibaldi and his sister learned that their greatest danger came from man, especially the man who was both a farmer and an avid hunting sportsman, and who frequently used to wander the moors with a big shotgun tucked under one arm, and with his pack lead dog, Bell, ranging around. Several times Bell had picked up their scent, but on occasions it had been their father who had led the dog astray by winding tortuous routes over hills and valleys, through woods and across streams, while their mother with Garibaldi slid quietly away to find a fresh form.

One day the hunting sportsman almost caught them unawares, with disastrous results; it happened like this: Garibaldi and his sister had been left in their form while their mother was away, when they heard the rustle of feet through grass and gorse; they crouched lower, but otherwise did not move. The feet came closer and closer, and they caught the hot pant of the dog, Bell, as well. Just as it seemed that the hunting pair must surely step on them, their father leapt high in the air about fifteen yards away.

The farmer's gun roared: a snap shot, but Garibaldi heard the lead pellets thud into his father's body; a high scream followed, and Garibaldi knew that his father had been mortally hurt. In the same instant, so quick were their reactions, their mother flashed by in long curving strides, and Garibaldi and his sister broke cover with her. The gun roared again, but none was hurt, although Bell was now after them.

They ran a short distance, then with a quick swerve in body language, their mother ordered her two leverets to stop and lie still. They did so, crouching motionless to the ground in an instant, while their mother leapt back along their track, then off at an angle, leading Bell a wild chase before he was shaken off in exhaustion, with lank heaving flanks and dripping tongue. That danger was over, but with that one lucky snap shot

their father was dead, and their lives were to change.

Garibaldi and his nervous sister were now nearly three-quarters grown, and already he felt strong and able to run very fast, although his sister was overly-timid, then in fear careless and rash at other times. Gradually over the weeks they felt their mother's irritation with them grow sharper, and they were left alone more often and for longer times, until one morning they woke in their form to find their mother had gone. Garibaldi's instinct told him that they would not see her again, yet both he and his sister lay still all that day and until dawn broke the following morning, when hunger drove them to move on cautiously and look for food.

Just what had happened to their mother, or where she could have gone, they had no idea, for it is not normal for mother hares to leave their leverets so soon in such a way. Both of them missed her greatly, even if she had become overly irascible since their father had been killed, still she had been all the world to them. Now the love in Garibaldi's warm nature flowed wholly towards his timid sister, towards whom he became very protective.

As the long summer months passed they both grew to nearly adult size; they had long since lost their baby fur and fat, and had become lean and strong and fleet of foot. Garibaldi was an especially fine hare, although not as large as his father, he was more nimble and lithe, while his wind and endurance in any hunt would have been the envy of most hares of his age; on the other hand he did not as yet have his father's experience, nor did he know the surrounding country as well.

Although his sister was also built for speed, she was too lightly built and pretty ever to have Garibaldi's strength and endurance; also, she was quite unsuited to being cruelly hunted, as indeed they were from time to time, since she would tend to lose her nerve and panic. Again and again it was Garibaldi who led Bell and the pack of hounds away, out-maneuvering and out-running those savage beasts, looping in great curves until the dogs were panting and dazed from exhaustion, with Bell's red tongue hanging out and dripping with sweat.

Knowing nothing else, Garibaldi came to accepting these hunts as a part of normal living, for while he feared and was wary of the man with the gun who brought about his father's death, yet he knew he could always outrun Bell or any of the hounds in the hunters pack. Garibaldi was quite intelligent, and at a stage in his life whereby this was the only real way he could stretch his wits; indeed it was fortunate that he did have this hard training, for his future was not to be so easy.

With the oncoming of winter, the two young hares were to experience their first real dose of coursing; a cruel sport in which hounds, backed and guided by men usually on horseback, but occasionally on foot, would hunt a hare to the end of its strength, and its death in being torn to pieces by the hounds. The first time this happened neither Garibaldi nor his sister were directly involved, but they heard the horns, the shouts of men and the eager baying and barking of dogs on a distant hill, until the sounds died away as the hunt pursued their quarry further and further from them.

Garibaldi had never seen or heard a big hunt like this before, with a full pack of tenacious dogs and many men on horseback, though their mother had spoken of it once as the ultimate in danger and terror; but Garibaldi knew anyway, and was afraid, and this tension in him communicated itself to his



...they heard the horns and shouts of men...

sister as she, too, realised and trembled in fear, so that Garibaldi had to quiet her and lie by her side, giving of his own strength and warmth, until at length her fears were soothed and she grew calm.

In his simple mind Garibaldi knew the day must come when they would be the prey, and not just listeners and onlookers from a distance. That day was to come all too soon, and although Garibaldi even fought to save his sister, he had known inside that she had neither the nerve nor the stamina to survive such a gruelling pursuit as this ruthless form of coursing a hare, when men and dogs combined in numbers against one small animal who had only wit and speed to survive, and that with fortune smiling kindly.

Early one winter day they were both nibbling at some old shoots, when they heard the distant baying of hounds and shouts of men. They pricked up their ears and were very still; Garibaldi then rose and stretched himself tall to try and catch sight of the hunt, but he could see nothing, for they were not on either adjoining hill. For a short time he waited with pounding heart as the sounds came closer, and until he knew the pack was coming their way.

There was no time to lose. Treating his sister much as a mother hare might her leveret, Garibaldi quickly led her along to a hideaway they knew, nuzzled her to lie still, gazed sadly into her big soft brown eyes, then leapt off back-tracking along the same route to impress on the ground his own scent and so lead the pack away from his sister; when he had covered about a hundred yards, he turned and sped up and down the track to strengthen his scent, and so obliterate as far as possible that of his sister's, before veering off on a new course.

In fact this guile did not work as well as it should have done, for when the hounds came in sight over the brow of the hill they soon picked up the scent of hare, and it did not take them long before they found the end of Garibaldi's false trail, where he had jinked away at an angle. Garibaldi showed himself briefly, and then ran on to a higher point where he stopped again and looked back to make sure the whole pack was following his trail.

All might have gone well, for normally a pack will not split, but a lesser number were running about yelping over Garibaldi's false scent trail. Then the men on horseback came over the hill, and with barely a moments pause the master of the hunt drove the dogs down his sister's trail, for it was there that the wily dog, Bell, the leader of the pack, stood and bayed.

In a moment all the dogs, along with those who had been trailing Garibaldi, with the men on horseback running hot on their heels, slavered and panted their way down the short trail which led to Garibaldi's nervous sister.

Now Garibaldi and his sister had grown up almost as one; they had first lost their father, and then their mother while they were together, and as one they had already lived through fears and dangers, but always with Garibaldi as the guide, defender and comforter. Even as young hares life had always been hard and bleak and full of perils, but tolerable because they knew of no other, and also because of his gentle sister, his supportive role and the strong bond between them.

In that same moment Garibaldi lost any caution and fear: he leapt off the high vantage point where he had been waiting, and ran straight towards where his sister lay; like a brown blur he sped over the ground, but no matter how fast he ran the dogs were too close to their quarry.

To Garihaldi the next few seconds seemed stilled in time, the scenes burnt forever in sequence on his mind. There was a single piercing scream as Bell and the pack leapt on to Garibaldi's sister and broke her back in a single crunch, then flinging her body high in the air. The men arrived at the scene at almost the same moment, and while they saw this awful finale, they also watched as a lithe male hare darted out of the bushes to their left, and then sprang on to the middle of the pack of snarling worrying dogs, but not to his death, for with superb madness and poise Garibaldi leapt from the back of one dog on to another, and from there right over the whole pack, while the sluggish dogs scarcely knew what was going on; a few tried to squirm round to snap at this worrisome will-of-the-wisp, but before their jaws could close on the hare he was gone, and away over the Common where no dog followed in spite of the goading cries from the hunters: the hounds had made their kill, and before ever order could be restored Garibaldi was too far away and forgotten by the pack.

Garibaldi would never have dared such a feat in any sane moment, but his tremendous love and fear for his sister had lent wings to his feet, and in those brief moments cast out any terror of both dogs and men; in fact his short lithe leaps over the backs of the dogs, and his flashing eyes and acute senses, had pictured indelibly on his mind his sister's body, torn and bloodied, her left ear already ripped off and lying on the reddened grass. As long as he lived Garibaldi would never forget this awful scene that his eyes had picked up in a micro-second of aerial movement.

Garibaldi loped off across the country in a state of stunned shock, until the snarling of the pack and the rough cries of the men faded into the distance. In those moments he cared not whether they followed him or not, nor whether he suffered a like fate as his sister's; all he felt and knew was that earlier that very day she had been with him, warm and alive and dependent on his wits and speed, his only companion, while now she was gone, the picture of her death with him forever, her dying scream ringing in his head. He ranged on and on, the miles slipping away beneath his feet, until at length sheer weariness dropped him to the ground in a stupor.

For a year, and a little more than half a year, Garibaldi lived on the same area of the moors and scattered woodland which lay above the farms to the east and west. He lived a solitary life and was very lonely, yet he kept his strength and speed for he was often hunted. Indeed, since his feat of running over and on the backs of a full pack of dogs he had become a mini legend overnight, and hunters from far away would come with their dogs from time to time to try and run him down and take his head and pelt; but none succeeded, for Garibaldi was not only a very intelligent hare, but he had an exceptional turn of speed and stamina to match.

And so it went on until there came an ominous lull in the hunting, so that Garibaldi was for a while left in peace. Of course he had no idea what lay in store for him, nor that he was so highly sought after, which perhaps was fortunate, since he could have avoided what lay in wait simply by moving his area of living so far away that he would be lost to the hunters without a trace; but then again, had he known, and had he moved, he would never have found what his unknowing loneliness sought: an awareness of his inner self, his soul, and the companionship for which he yearned.

One morning as the late summer Sun was still rising in the sky, Garibaldi once again heard the sounds of baying dogs, and behind them the shouts of men. He ran to his high vantage point, the same to which he had run on the



*...for with superb madness and poise Garibaldi
leapt from the back of one dog to another...*

day of his sister's death, and looked down into the valley, to see a large pack of dogs and many men on horseback making their way up the long slope towards where he stood and watched. They were still a long way off, yet Garibaldi felt a strange tremor of fear in spite of the fact that he had become quite used to these hunts, for experience had taught him that no hound could run him down, even as a pack; he waited until they came over the lower brow of the hill, from which point he could assess rather better what he was up against.

When Garibaldi could see more closely the large pack of hounds, a cold shudder ran down his spine, for the newcomers that followed behind the main pack were tall, thin rangy beasts with pointed muzzles, narrow muscular bodies and long legs, held on leashes by three men on foot: they were in fact greyhounds which could not scent their quarry, but trailed by sight; thus the main body of the pack sniffed and ran with their muzzles near the ground, while the half-dozen greyhounds behind merely loped easily along, waiting for the hounds to flush the hare before they were released to spring into action.

Garibaldi had never seen dogs like this before, but both his instinct and intelligence told him that here, behind the large pack of hounds, loped a very terrible enemy from which he would be fortunate indeed if he could escape with his life. Garibaldi leapt down on the lee side of his high vantage point, and ran inland away from the pack, but behind the shelter of the hillock where at least he could not be seen for a while. As he ran he sometimes sprang to the right or left to delay the pursuit by breaking his line of scent; in fact Garibaldi's main aim was to reach a line of trees about four hundred yards ahead of him, and from there to skirt round the back and head down into another valley where he knew there was a stream flowing into a river.

Garibaldi did not usually run this way for the hill had a steep downward slope, unsuited to his build and strength, for he knew very well that his best speed could most easily be maintained on either a flat or a rising slope, slopes that would soon wind any normal hound, but which gave his strong backward legs tremendous purchase. Garibaldi feared these new dogs, he feared their gaunt height and length of leg, and the easy way they strode the land, so he knew he must go down into the valley where he hoped to break his scent trail in the stream, or even the river; if these failed he would have a better chance afterwards in the rolling hills beyond.

Garibaldi soon reached the line of trees, and shortly after he heard the familiar baying of the hounds which had caught his scent, and with them the cries of men on horseback. They had not yet seen him, but the life or death hunt was on. He jinked downhill along the line of trees, not bothering now to leap to left or right to break his scent trail, for he knew that once they had the tree line to follow, nothing much would delay their pursuit.

On and on he ran down an ever-steepening hill towards the valley below, his weaker front legs jarring his shoulder joints as he never slackened his pace. Still they had not seen him, and the baying of hounds and sporadic shouts of men fell back, while the six greyhounds were held firmly on their leashes. Garibaldi allowed himself a flicker of hope, but then he made a terrible mistake: in front of him rose a short slope before the land again fell down to the valley, while to his left here was a shallow circling rocky ravine, caused by the scouring of torrential rains, which met around the other side of the slope. His shoulder joints were by now quite bruised and

painful, and the sight of the steep downward sloping ravine alarmed; so without pausing he sped up the short rise to relieve his aching joints.

But one of the men, or perhaps a greyhound, glimpsed his fawn-coloured body as it flickered over the brown gorse and coarse grass, and the shout went up from about five-hundred yards away. The greyhounds were unleashed, and leapt away as one. Garibaldi had a good start, and had it only been the usual pack of hounds led by Bell he would have considered the chase as good as over; but these tall greyhounds were quite another matter, and once they had seen Garibaldi they stretched their racing limbs and sped over the land like bullets, straight for that give-away knoll, cutting the round-about way which Garibaldi had to make to avoid being seen, quickly passing and leaving the pack of labouring and panting hounds as they ran. Garibaldi heard the cry, and caught a sight of these lean engines of destruction before he ran over the short rise, and on to the gentler final dip into the valley; but he was filled with dread.

He raced on down the gentler slope as the hill fell gradually to the valley floor; this was untested country to him, but he had to have water to cast his scent, for Garibaldi had not realised that greyhounds hunted only by sight; also he was growing tired, for at such speed that long, steep downward slope had strained his body unnaturally, so that even his hardened muscles began to flag, while his little mouth gaped open as his breath came in short shallow pants: he must steady this wild pace, or he would not be able to cope with the stream which flowed only a few hundred yards ahead, and beyond that the wider river, perhaps a further eight hundred yards, flanked thinly with a variety of tree.

Although the greyhounds were overtaking Garibaldi, they were still a fair distance behind, so he slowed his pace to allow him to catch his wind and strength. The stream was now only a very short distance ahead, with the greyhounds about three hundred yards behind Garibaldi. Then he was there; one leap and he was mid-stream and letting the swift-flowing current carry him down with it, guiding himself as well as he was able without losing his wits. About fifty yards or more on, the stream swept into a left-hand bend, and Garibaldi struggled towards the further bank, half swimming and jumping off the pebbly bed until he managed to struggle quickly up the bank and into a shallow dip, where he stopped without moving, save for his heaving lungs.

Garibaldi's downstream journey had been too turbulent for him to take note of the pursuing greyhounds, which he had instinctively assumed should now be at the spot where he had leapt into the water upstream, seeking him out, for they could not have seen him from where they ran as the stream flowed in an eroded dip, quite unseen until one was almost upon it.

Garibaldi had been used to hunting hounds who followed a scent trail, and only by sight when they were practically on the hare; it was therefore a shock when he presently heard the greyhounds loping along the opposite bank, having rounded the bend in the stream, quite close to where he lay, ears flattened, but poorly concealed because the dip he was in was barely five inches below the level of the bank itself.

The greyhounds themselves were quite winded, although the long downbill stretch had put no particular strain on them, as it had on Garibaldi; They were therefore not quite so keen on the chase as they had been, and might have wandered back had not one of them spotted Garibaldi where he lay across the further bank of the stream, and gave a short, sharp bark.

Their hunting instincts were fired-up again, and while crossing the stream should have been an easy matter for these long-legged dogs, yet it took them a while as they daintily picked their way across the shifting pebbles. But Garibaldi's reactions were like lightning, for as soon as he knew he had been seen he was up and away, running hard for the river which flowed about eight hundred yards further on, but now on level ground, so Garibaldi could give more of his natural power to his speed.

By the time the greyhounds had crossed the stream and climbed the bank, Garibaldi had perhaps a start of eight seconds; he sped on in a straight line with all the speed he had, while far back the hunters and hounds could see this final chase, and bellowed encouragement to their greyhounds, who had by now flattened out and were skimming the surface of the ground like pellets from a shotgun.

As a hare Garibaldi had been given the gift of speed, but in this he knew he could never compete with greyhounds; as the distance shortened to the river, his quick judgment told him that he could not keep ahead of these long-legged dogs by his speed alone; behind him the gap was rapidly closing until one dog, slighter faster than the others, caught up to within a yard of Garibaldi's strong back legs.

Garibaldi jumped suddenly to the left, with the dog swerving more clumsily in pursuit. Then the other greyhounds were nearly on him, and he had to jump again, and yet again to avoid their snapping jaws, while all the time his strength and stamina were fast diminishing, yet still he managed to draw the combat in the general direction of the river. Dodging with death close on his heels went on until all six greyhounds were running, swerving and snapping, even to turning on each other in their frantic efforts to tear at the leaping, darting will-of-the-wisp hare; even so they were quick and Garibaldi was hopelessly outnumbered, and so worn out now that there were flecks of blood-tinged foam around his open mouth.

This hopelessly uneven contest could never have continued for more than a very short space of time at the intensity and speed at which it was being maintained; but Garibaldi was now aware of the river immediately to his right: in that same instant, without conscious thought, he leapt with all his remaining strength into the strongly flowing turgid water that closed over his head. One dog followed him, and was lost forever, but the others stood along the bank afraid, their legs shaking and their wind broken.

Garibaldi had only a fleeting memory of what followed: the rush of water carried him downstream, sometimes sucked down by swirling eddies and being rolled along the river's bed - but instinct and his natural quick reactions made him gasp for air when he could. His feebly struggling body was almost helpless in the powerful grip of fast-flowing water as it swept him towards a weir. For a short distance the river became deeper and calmer, and then with a thunder of crashing water Garibaldi was swept over the edge in a sheet of curling water - at which point he knew no more.

At the foot of the weir were several people fishing from the banks which half-circled a deep basin of water, fed from the weir's curving spill from the river above. The quick eye of a girl, Sonseeahrey, spotted the turning body of the hare as it fell in the midst of the cascading water. She called to a burly man close by: in a moment he had plunged into the pool, and with a long fishing net had neatly whisked Garibaldi's body to safety on the bank, where he lay unconscious and helpless, but alive.

Sonseeahray, who had seen the hare's watery fall, took him and wrapped him in a dry sun-warmed towel; she could feel his heart beating weakly. At the Inn close by where she and others were guests, they all knew her father, the quiet man with his wife and attractive daughter from Africa, who had booked into the Inn for a short spell before returning home; he was a man with gentle, far-seeing eyes that saw deeply into people and nature. The girl knew she must take this poor hare to her father; "He'd know what to do," she thought. With that she gathered up her fishing gear and the limp body of the half-drowned hare, and made her way back to the Inn.

Helped by his wife and Sonseeahray, Garibaldi recovered quite quickly, but he was worn out and weak from the terrible hunt with greyhounds. In spite of their care and kindness he could not at first help having a tense wariness of people: deeply rooted in him was an in-built fear of mankind from years of running from cruel hunts, the snap shooting of his father, his beloved sister's torn death; such a deeply embedded lonely past was very difficult to push aside; Garibaldi had a warm heart, but with no one to give his frustrated love.

Later on that same day, after Garibaldi had slept, the man spoke to him in the language known by all proper animals and birds of the wild. Garibaldi knew this inborn language, although he had never before used it; he knew that he could trust and even love this family, and his taut nerves relaxed.

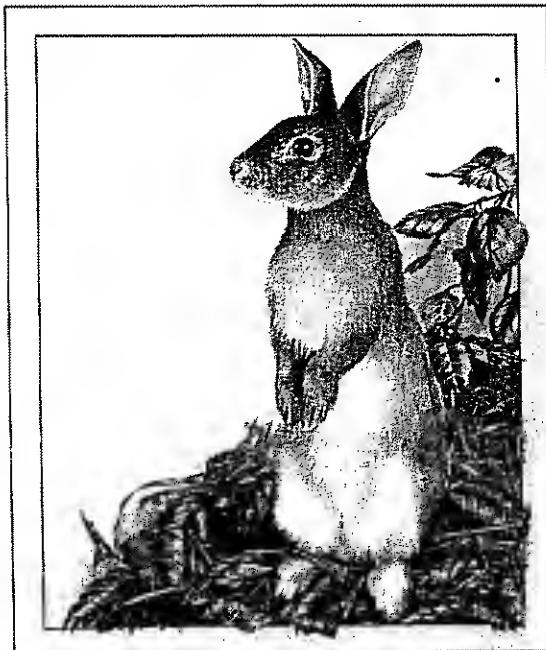
He learned that 'he was free to live on the moors again, but with none to love him, and probably none for him to love, to live with fear and be hunted all his life, until at some stage he'd be caught and torn to pieces; or to live with these wonderful people and their friends in love and safety.'

No choice was needed: Garibaldi gave the man, his wife and their lovely daughter his complete love and trust. Later, after they had all returned to their home in Africa near to the sea, a large field with a river beyond, he learned, mainly from B-4-tis, about the wonder of Great Grey Overbuns; with this new knowledge he lost the last traces of hopelessness and tension that had paced his life until the climax, his last hunt; and his soul was opened and peace flooded in.

GREAT GREY OVERBUNS

It was a blustery winter's night, and the rain lashed against the cottage windows; but inside the large sitting room all was peaceful and warm with a coal and log fire burning in the grate, sending out long flickers of golden light which danced lazily on the walls and ceiling. The man with the blue of the sea in his eyes put down his book and gazed into the fire for a while, before glancing around the room. His wife sat nearby engrossed in the fine mending of a tear in Scutterford's blue coat with the brass buttons; the coat was old now and becoming shiny in places, but Scutterford loved it so much that he could never be persuaded to part with it and have a new one; as a result it had been carefully mended many times, although without him knowing several of his brass buttons had also been discretely replaced.

B~4~tis



Both River Otter and Sammy were rolled into sleek fur balls, fast asleep in front of the fire, for while they did not mind the cold, they had spent much of that day chasing across the huge open space of grass and wild plants, interspersed with plunges into the river, but always warily for fear of the occasional crocodile. Beloved by all, Old Grey had succumbed at last to old age a few weeks before and had been taken up into his place in Paradise; he had felt secure and happy with the other two otters, indeed with all the other animals whom the man and his wife had taken into their home, but he was especially missed by the other two otters who had loved either to catch fish for him, or half stun one so that even Old Grey's weakened eyes with their blurred vision could take it in his teeth before the fish could recover to swim away; of course neither River Otter or Sammy ever told Old Grey of their simple ruse; but he had known,

although the two younger otters were never told: Old Grey had been a true warm-hearted gentleman.

Garibaldi also dozed quietly crouching low to the carpet, perhaps a little leaner than when they had fished him out of the turbulent pool below the weir, yet he bore about his person an almost ageless quality which belied his years; between the man and his wife the four rabbits sat or lay in a row, gazing sleepily with half-closed eyes into the mesmerising flames, dreaming contentedly. The man looked at them all, and felt more poignantly than ever before just how dependent they all were on his wife and himself, and how all of them had aged during their various past difficult times:

Scutterford was very grey now; B-4-tis, too, had aged considerably of late, did less and dozed more often; even his precious bag of collected herbal medicines with his invaluable plastic spoon were now lying loosely on the carpet before him, something he would never normally have allowed in time gone by. Hereford, who was Hlawahee in Minnesota a very long time ago, and who had arrived under the most mysterious of circumstances, which may one day be told, but not yet; he, too, was aging, his golden-tipped fur was now misted with grey.

The man's eyes strayed over to Thumperford, and he wondered yet again how that little silver-tipped rabbit had stayed alive for as long as he had, for his health had been broken after many months of captivity in Abijoudi's store in Monrovia, followed shortly afterwards helping B-4-tis in the thick of a myxamatosis plague in the south of England; much of Thumperford's near miraculous survival had been due to the special care that B-4-tis had given his friend after he had been taken in by this unique man with the blue of the sea in his eyes, his loving care for them all, and his ability to speak in the simple language common to all proper birds and animals.

The man looked back into the flames, and thought: he was concerned, for he, too, felt the cramp of late middle-age, and instinctively knew that it would not be too long before he at least would be called to leave this world: this did not worry him personally, but he was concerned for his beloved wife should he be the first to go and she left without his love and protection; also Sonseeahray whose attraction and natural innocence in her work as a budding naturalist left her too open and trusting for safety in a world of increasing disarray and evils which had been unimaginable in his own youth; lastly for the animals who were so dependent on them both, but who could converse only through him, for the gift of knowing their common tongue was rare, and neither his wife nor his daughter, Sonseeahray, had been given that gift.

Hypnotically his mind went out of focus as he gazed into the spell of the dancing flames, then almost as soon as he did so a deep sense of peace swept over him as he felt himself carried smoothly through the mists of time and no time, of life blending for a spell with greater life, until his inner mind was mysteriously drawn to the form of Great Grey Overbuns herself, Queen of all proper animals and birds; he wondered briefly why such a comparatively helpless and harmless animal, a prey to others, should have been chosen for such an honour, and in her partial shadow he saw the younger and brightly living form of Old Grey, who had died only a few weeks earlier: Then, in a flash of pure inspiration he understood as he recalled the third 'Text' that ran - "The meek shall inherit the Earth".

With his extra-sensory perceptions highly attuned to the brilliant inner light of truth and

Garibaldi



reality, he became immersed in a sea of impressions, clear and crisp as they were carried on thought waves; so he came to know that Great Grey Overbuns had already lived through many lives; he saw that she had grown wise and strong from suffering; gentle and loving from loss and afflictions.

Then, easily and naturally, these impressions withdrew, and he knew that he was being shown the final stages of Great Grey Overbun's last life on Earth. She had been one of a family of rabbits living somewhere in the English countryside a good many years ago. Life for them had perils enough, but they were also frequently harried and hunted by a weather-tanned farmer and his black Alsatian dog. No lives had been lost so far, although the hunts before had been close, but they knew that it was only a matter of time before one or all of them would be shot or torn to shreds. They lived with fear and hunger, their lives haunted by the wandering dog, ever wary of venturing far from the safety of their small warren and the sheltering hedge; so the family grew thin with hunger, and did not increase.

There were only four of them: Overbun's parents who had been together for many years, and who were both past their prime, her brother who was lightly built and not very robust, and herself. Their original home had been in a warren at the foot of a Silver Birch tree, but as it grew in numbers the farmer soon discovered it, so they were forced to leave and took to living nerve-wracking lives under hedgerows around the verges of fields. This was a perilous and stop-gap way of life, for wherever they moved in the area in which they had lived all their lives there was always the black Alsatian who could scent them out.

Because Overbuns had the quickest wit and was the strongest and fastest rabbit in the small family, her brother and parents increasingly relied on her in their daily lives and infrequent dashes for food: fear permeated through the hapless little family, which both farmer and dog knew; the man was also shrewdly aware that Overbuns was in practice their leader, and that perhaps she would somehow be the instrument of saving them from their short-lived state of fear and almost constant alertness, for their enforced dash-and-hide lives had also left them more vulnerable to their natural predators: very soon this crisis would come to pass.

Overbuns next saw the man striding across the field with his Alsatian at his heels, and a double-barrelled shot-gun tucked under his right arm with the muzzles pointing down. The dog then nosed ahead, and soon picked up the scents of the four rabbits in a stout hedge barely 30 yards ahead of his master, whining eagerly, tail stiff, pointing to where the four rabbits crouched together on the ground guarded only by the thick stems of the hedge through which the dog could not reach them, but through which barricade they could pass had they dared; it was a stalemate position as far as the family of rabbits and the Alsatian were concerned, but helpless as sitting targets to the man's shotgun which could blow them all out with no difficulty.

The farmer took in the situation at a glance, and smiled evilly as he slowed his walk towards the hedge, relishing the ease of this hunt with its inevitable outcome; he had been after these few rabbits for a long time.

Time seemed to stand still as three of the family of rabbits hugged the ground, their limbs paralysed by terror and shock, while the hot breath and salivating jaws of the black Alsatian held them rooted to the spot.



But Overbuns, although terrified and trembling, felt the hot blood pound through her body. She watched carefully, waiting her moment. The farmer drew closer, unslung his big shotgun while walking towards the hedgerow - ten yards, five, three, two. He stopped, waved his dog to one side and raised the gun to his shoulder and began to squeeze the trigger, the twin barrels pointing at the centre of the three huddled rabbits which he could now see quite clearly.

At that moment Overbuns ran straight under the body of the Alsatian, which seemed to arch his back in a semi-circle in an effort to catch the fleeing rabbit in its jaws. Events then flowed with a bewildering swiftness as

Overbuns ran at the momentarily stunned farmer, followed closely by the dog; but inches from his right boot, she swerved slightly to the left and ran on past him into the field and towards a small lake which lay beyond. However, the big dog was not so agile, and his heavy body slammed against the farmer's leg, knocking him partially off balance, before putting out all his savage strength into catching Overbuns.

There is little doubt that in the open field the powerful Alsatian would have caught Overbuns in a relatively shot distance, and torn her to pieces; but then, and all very swiftly, there occurred an incredible moving configuration of disastrous events: the farmer stumbled, recovered his balance with an oath, swung round with his shotgun still at his shoulder, and with only an instant to re-aim, fired one barrel at the fleeing form of Overbuns. However, in those terribly brief moments of re-aiming and firing, his black Alsatian gun-dog streaked across his sights at point-blank range in pursuit of Overbuns, so that the central bunch of pellets from the twelve-bore caught the dog full in its face, practically blasting its jaw off. As the dog slid to the ground, the farmer let off his second barrel at the rabbit. Overbuns staggered under the shock of the pellets, many of which had raked her back and rump, but she still managed to limp on, though far more slowly now, and bleeding heavily.

With a face like thunder, the farmer took three swift strides towards the living but mortally wounded dog. The Alsatian, although stunned and blinded in one eye, tried to raise its head, whimpering through its shattered jaw. The man looked at the animal, but made no attempt to touch it; his eyes reflected a strange mixture of sorrow and anger, yet seemingly without any affection for the dog which had served him so well. He reloaded his gun, both barrels, and shot his dog through its eye with a single blast, so that it died immediately - it was the last shot he ever fired.

The farmer then made off across the field at a trot towards the rabbit and the small lake.

Overbuns was weakening fast, but still managed to hop slowly and painfully down the short slope to the lake with its gently lapping waves. There was no safety for her; she knew her life was spent, yet somehow she sought to spend her last strength near this watery peace.

But she could not reach it, for her body finally gave out about ten yards from the shore, and she rolled on to her side and lay still, her rich brown pain-filled eyes looking up into the blue sky with its fleecy clouds drifting past. At that moment the farmer came up to her, and the two, the gentle mortally wounded rabbit and the powerfully built man, looked briefly into each other, before Overbun's eyes glazed over, and with a whisper of a sigh she died.

The farmer stood and stared at the dead rabbit for a full minute, but his face showed no expression. Then suddenly, with an explosive roar of anger and grief he gripped his gun by the barrels, swung it high above his head and brought it down to the ground with such force that the stock shattered and the barrels bent; he picked up the broken weapon, and with all his strength hurled it far out into the middle of the lake, where it sank and was gone forever. Then, without looking back at the two dead animals, he strode away quickly up the slope to his house.

The man with the blue of the sea in his eyes felt a gentle wind run through his hair, and at the same time the soft fawn fur on Overbun's body rippled lightly, then sank and was still. He sat still and gazed into the fire, not wishing to break the magic moment; he had previously noticed the time from the clock on the mantelpiece: five minutes past eight, and it was still five minutes past eight - the hands had not moved at all.

A movement, and effortlessly his mind and inner sight were swept on and up to the most vivid scene of Great Grey Overbuns waiting on the road to Eternity, while ahead of her stood the open gates to a great and wondrous city; around her the air shimmered with subtle lights beyond our normal span and description in their telling - but still she waited, for in this vibrant timeless state, that in perfect balance thrilled the very ethers, waiting was no burden. The man understood, though he knew not how.

Years later the farmer also died, and up from the dark abyss of the world he strode, though his step grew more hesitant on the path as he drew nearer to the glorious city. On he came, less sure of himself now, but wiser, and an honest man in his beliefs, until he drew close to Great Grey Overbuns, and stopped to talk with the rabbit. For a time the two conversed, for here language is no barrier; the farmer's face was gentle now, especially when he stooped to run a hand down Great Grey Overbun's back, and felt the terrible knotted scars that lay under her silken fur.

Then together, as companions of a sort, they passed through the open gates and into the Shining City.

The scene faded, and the man with the blue of the sea in his eyes looked up; his heart was full, at peace and without fear. Once again his eyes caught the hands of the clock - five minutes past eight. He looked across at his wife and a love-light passed between them as their eyes met; he thought, too, of his beloved daughter whom they had Christened Sonseeahray, an old Apache name meaning 'Morning Star' that had caught his inspiration shortly before her birth, and which had proved to be so very appropriate.

At their feet lay or sprawled in scattered array seven pairs of eyes, all of which looked



Then suddenly, with an explosive roar of anger and grief he gripped his gun by the barrel, swung it above his head...

trustingly up at them, and because of what he had just seen and experienced he knew that all would be well with them, and because he knew it, so too did they.

Bartimeaus and The Cat In The Forgotten Land

Some 40 years ago a family found themselves in a foreign land where the father had been sent by The Geological Society to explore for certain minerals. This remote equatorial country was situated in one of the most inhospitable regions on Earth, hot with a saturating humidity; an ideal breeding ground for malaria in a most virulent form, and for a host of other tropical diseases. Then there was the festering problem between the 2000 or so descendants of freed slaves, who ruled with greed and a heavy hand over the two million indigenous people, keeping them in dire poverty. Life was hard, and disease and death lurked silently in the shadows; but this couple were in desperate need, so with their two children, and with misgivings, they accepted the potential hazards and went.

Shortly after the family arrived, a young rabbit, Bartimeaus or Barty as he came to be named, was taken in to live with them in their Company house, and quickly became a popular and well-loved addition to the family, but was especially close to a large orange tom-cat who had arrived before, and who was simply known as 'The Cat': Cats are not easy to name as they tend to walk alone, and there is always a certain stately aloofness between them and humans; but not so between Barty and The Cat, for here there was a mutual bond of understanding; in the evenings they played together on the parquet floor in the sitting room, skidding about in games of chase, first one acting as the chaser, then the other. So ran an harmonious home for some months, until Barty began to feel uneasy, his instincts alert to some evil thing seeping in from beyond the four walls, and the small plot of garden that had become his home.

During the days while the children were at the Mission School, and their mother was often out, The Cat and Barty often went exploring beyond the house and garden; although timid, Barty felt safe with his strong and agile friend who knew several animals, and so much about everything in their locality. Instinct drove him to find out as much as he could, since he felt their idyllic life would not long remain the same; he could not explain this fear, but he knew that his friend, The Cat, felt much the same. He wondered in his own way how it was that these clever humans, this family who had given him love and a home, were not more keenly attuned and more aware; but it was not long before both animals began to sense a growing tension in the house, particularly in the father's manner, while the mother was quieter, during which time they both gave less attention to Barty and the Cat, while the children, for the time being at least, lived in a happy-go-lucky whirl of school and play.

One evening after the father had come home, he and the mother had a brief discussion, followed shortly by some hurried packing, during which time the two animals were practically ignored. Outside their home Barty and The Cat heard disturbing murmurs from gangs of angry humans wandering aimlessly from place to place. Two days passed slowly, the gangs swelling in numbers, becoming seething mobs as their mood grew increasingly frustrated, uglier and more vicious, filling the air with fear and a dangerous madness. Events followed swiftly, and early on the third morning the family packed the car with what they could carry, locked up their home and drove off, leaving the house empty and silent.

Both animals knew that the father had taken his family to some place of safety, but neither knew where, nor did they know if he would be coming back to care for them. Animals are cleverer, and certainly more sensitive to prevailing thoughts, than most humans generally

believe, and both wondered if they might not have been left, expendable to the greater needs of the family; still they hoped.

Beyond the silence in the house, Barty and The Cat could hear and feel the surge of the mobs, closer and louder than before, accompanied by the smashing of glass and crashes as houses were broken into; while occasional sharp blasts of gun-shots and high-pitched screams seared through the early morning air: murder, violence and destruction were afoot, which continued intermittently throughout the day. In need of mutual comfort, the two animals drew closer to each other.

They were both desperately afraid as they crouched together in corners or under tables; The Cat reacting at times by spitting and hissing, his fur standing on end, his strong muscles flexing and writhing as he tore at an old carpet with his needle-sharp claws. They waited as the day wore on, eating some scraps that had been left, but there was no sign of the father. As dusk swiftly drew its mantle over the turbulent land, a cool on-shore breeze stirred the still almost stagnant air, quieter now as the fast approaching night began to draw its veil over the terrible deeds of the day, heavy with violence and blood.

Above the clicking of crickets and other noises of the night, Barty caught the sound of an approaching car, and by its note knew that it was the father returning home - but for how long? Both animals ran to the back door which led on to the open-ended drive-in garage. The car pulled up, the engine stilled, after which they heard him walking slowly towards the back-door, fumbling for the key. They both knew from the slight drag of his feet that the father was tired and deeply troubled. He came in and greeted the two animals warmly as if they were all he had left; yet both felt that he had also come to take them away, and to bid them 'Good bye'.

The father had no choice; he knew that insurrection had broken out, and that the indigenous people had at last risen and begun slaughtering those rich slavers who had not been able to escape in time, plundering their houses and razing many of them to the ground; often as funeral pyres, for in their vengeful savagery they sometimes forced those still living into their own homes, locked the doors and fired their houses, yelling in horrid glee at the screams of those trapped inside.

He knew, too, that time was short, for when the crazed crowds had vented their primitive passions on the families and property of the rich slavers, they could then turn on any foreigners in the land. He had managed to get his wife and children to the port, and by desperate persuasion and bribery had embarked them on the only ship that ever passed that way, a coastal flat-bottomed steamer that would, by slow stages, eventually dock at Liverpool: A feeling of guilt swept over him at ever bringing his family to this forgotten land, and now he could not even go with them, for he had some vital samples, maps and notes to take with him, or destroy.

Now all this had been done, and he had just enough time to take their two animals to the Vet to be put down; having to do this was tearing at his already battered mind, but he knew there was no other possible course of action in the very limited time, when every lost minute greatly increased the danger to himself; after which he would persuade a local fisherman to take him further along the coast, and from there rely on his ingenuity and luck to complete his own escape. Neither of the animals could know any of this, nor could their innocent minds have fully grasped the savage and terrible deeds that were going on about them, deeds born of a satanically base element that could so easily flare up from ungoverned primitivism; they knew only fear from the awful sounds of human madness

that clashed horribly with their own deeply ingrained instincts. Deeply distressed, with tears in his eyes, the father fed both animals before taking a light snack himself. They were silent, but eat a little; Barty knew that some drastic change lay ahead of them, against which even The Cat's power would be helpless. They both felt the father's awful fear and concern for his family, but they could not see that this final act in bringing about the deaths of these two animals also preyed on his mind like a dark cloud of finality. At the same time Barty sensed in his friend, The Cat, an acceptance of his own death, which was puzzling, for he was clever, strong and virile. For himself Barty felt that a time of loneliness, fear and hurt lay ahead; yet in the distance he saw beauty and peace, which was also strange as he was so defenceless; but there was no gainsaying his instinct, which he accepted quite simply, although his heart was heavy with dread. When all was ready, the father gathered up his two loved friends, holding them close and murmuring, "I love you; we all do, but there's nothing in this world I can do to save you; it's better you go back to God; we'll meet later in His care." Of course, neither Barty nor the Cat understood the words, but in nature's own special wordless language, they knew - they knew and understood.

The father took them both to the car, but never bothered to lock the door; there was no need, for they would not be returning. He drove through back ways to the local vet, who was standing in the doorway to his surgery, waiting to lock-up preparatory to moving inland to his home, hopefully far enough to be safe from hostilities. Those final moments were confused. Barty tried to link minds with his friend, but there was no response: The Cat knew that while his own life must end here, his margin for action was slim, for he meant to save Barty if at all possible, and so dared not communicate with him in case he suspected what was in his mind; he knew that Barty, however timid, would give his life for his friend without a second thought.

In the surgery the father handed The Cat to the vet, who laid him on the surgery table, holding him gently but firmly, at the same time reaching for a needle to fit into an already filled syringe. The Cat lay still, his body relaxed, while time seemed to pass in slow motion for Barty as he was forced to watch his friend die; at last the moment came when the vet thrust the needle into The Cat, and began to press the plunger, injecting the death-dealing fluid.

Suddenly, as though waiting for this moment, from semi-dormancy The Cat sprang into action, fighting as he had never fought before, so that even with death coursing through his veins it took both men to hold him down, clawing and spitting, while the vet pushed the plunger hard until all the deathly fluid in the syringe was in The Cat's blood-stream. This change was so sudden, The Cat's ferocity and strength so great, that Barty slipped to the floor, allowing the father both hands free to help the vet; at the same time The Cat's beloved voice pierced the ethers, commanding and urgent, "Run, Barty, run now!" Barty ran to the open door, paused and looked back longingly; then once more, but briefly, and fading rapidly as his friend lay dying, The Cat's mind-call came to him again, "Run, run for your life!" With those words ringing in his head, Barty turned and ran. After which there was nothing more. With breaking heart, he ran blindly on, with just the low shush shush of his paws on the dusty ground, and the light slide and rustle as his body brushed through the thin dry grass. He realised now only too clearly that while his dear friend, The Cat, had to die, yet he had brought it about in such a way, with such cleverness, that his friend should have a chance to live.

Tears stung his eyes, blurring his vision; he swerved slightly and ran into thicker grass further from the footpath, his mind was stunned, filled only with these immediate events,

hammering one upon another with shocking impact; but above all, pain at the loss of his beloved friend. He could not prevent a feeling of unreality in the way The Cat had lain so quietly, and then exploded into a fireball of ferocity when it was too late to save himself, nor could he as yet understand why life had entwined their lives so closely; this was a wonder as yet beyond Barty's comprehension.

At that moment Barty's wandering thoughts were drawn back to the reality about him, when pressed into his bruised and dazed mind came the slap and thud of bare feet from heavy bodies, along with the sounds of approaching voices raised in anger: he veered aside from the narrow foot-path he had been following into higher and denser scrub grass, where he lay panting, crouching low to the ground, stunned in mind and temporarily worn out; barely conscious of where he was or of what moved about him, he let his mind trail his instinct and dazed thoughts along with those of his friend, The Cat, and realised, slowly at first, then with greater clarity, how finely they had blended together, and how they both had such highly tuned intuitions. Barty could scarcely admit to it at the time, but he had felt that The Cat's time had been at hand, and that destiny had marked him to die when he did.

To most animals, death in itself is but a short step, for their deepest instincts tell them with complete certainty that they would only pass from one life to another; the other being from whence they had come. In this their inbuilt intuitive link was greater than the minds and synthetic culture of most humans who, disengaged from nature and true Life, had forgotten their spiritual link with the Infinite in exchange for the baubles of an ephemeral earthbound existence.

In his innocent simplicity Barty was, of course, quite unaware of such high-flown thoughts; for the time being, and smothering all else, was the emptiness in his heart from the loss of his friend whom he dearly loved, and on whom he had relied so greatly for his comforting friendship and strength; even his own immediate dilemma had not as yet touched his mind to any depth - but with destiny's blade that would come.

As Barty lay quietly, his eyes drooped and kindly nature took over; his head sank on to his paws and he slept the sleep of forgetfulness; but he had slept too deeply for safety, for the strains on him had been great, so he was initially bemused by the acrid tang of smoke that drifted down upon him from burning grass and dried-out bushes; lightly at first, but then more thickly as the fire upwind spread wider and grew stronger and hotter; for while the grass and scrub was poor thin stuff, yet after many dry months under the searing rays of the sun it was tinder dry and highly inflammable.

Drawn into his lungs the pungent smell stung, which woke Barty with a start, his senses more alert, but not knowing what to do: he had not been born to the wild and was unused to its ways. Trembling slightly he stood up, then unwisely loped down-wind towards a settlement nearer the town. The smoke stung less as he outpaced the burning grass in the light wind; but he was bemused and frightened in the face of these new and menacing experiences, at the same time he felt a whisper of fear of running into a trap. Without thinking he turned back on to the track he had left a short while ago, for the ground was packed hard by many passing feet, and he could see better and so be more aware of what lay ahead; but still the smoke followed him, stinging his throat and lungs.

Barty began to panic: In his far past he had an instinctive fear of uncontrolled fire. Very soon he became aware of several strange animals fleeing in the same direction, away from the burning grass and scrub and towards a settlement; they were short-legged with long heads and noses, and with coarse hair as a shield against the very heavy, long and

steamy rainy season, for the country was as hard on animal life as it was on humans. Then ahead of him and through the smoke he saw a line of people making more fire, back-burning the grass to safeguard the land near their huts, and to trap any animals between the two walls of flames as they crept back against the light wind. Several of the men and women, carrying staves and heavy short-handled knives, jumped over the burning grass and ran towards the fleeing animals with high-pitched whistles and wild unnerving shouts, leaping from side to side and striking the ground with their staves to create still more panic among the terrified animals, many of whom were struck down and either killed instantly, or caught and swung alive by their hind legs, before being dashed to the ground.

Barty turned, as did most of the animals, and started to flee upwind to where the line of flames burned hungrily, varying in intensity due to patches of bare ground between dried-out clumps of grass; but still a barrier of scorching heat and swirling whorls of pungent smoke. He felt and saw that most of the few terrified animals were simple creatures, slow of wit to suit the climate, so ran in panic hither and thither, making them easy prey for the nimble humans; but among them he saw a strange tawny cat with ears that never rose above the line of his head, large, powerful and wild; even his friend, The Cat, would have appeared slight and slow by comparison. He knew this wild cat to be a dangerous predator, and by its lithe and sinuous movements that it was fast and ruthless, savage and clever.

The wild cat loped upwind towards the line of fire as it swept down upon them, slipping almost scornfully between the legs and whirling arms of the whistling, cursing and hacking humans; meanwhile, Barty had been seen by a couple who were working together in their brutal hunting and killing; terror clawed at him, but he remembered the games of chase that he and The Cat had often played in the evenings around the floor of the lounge, which had made him active and skilful in leaping about to evade his friend; so while keeping an eye on which way the wild cat would go, he ran and leapt for his life to avoid the staves and long knives that were whistling through the air about him, but all the time working his way towards the approaching line of fire.

The increasing frustration of the couple was accompanied by angry grunts of fruitless efforts and growing fury, as time and again these two humans came close to crushing his skull with a stave, or slashing at his light body, from which one blow would have either killed or wounded him so severely that he would afterwards have been too helpless to escape. Barty's strength was waning, yet he managed to get within 10 or 15 metres of the wall of fire bearing down on them all. The heat was intense and came at him in choking waves; however, being close to the ground he was less vulnerable to both the heat and the swirling clouds of dark smoke than were the two much taller humans. In his nimble dodging to evade the couple's attack, Barty thought he had lost sight of the wild cat; but in that moment, some way to his left, a dark blur caught his eye as he glimpsed its lithe form springing over a thinner gap in the wall of flame. A fleeting pause, and Barty ran to the same spot where he had seen the cat jump, and although nearing the end of his strength Barty also leapt over the thinning flames; only his paws hurt in the hot ash, which kept him running away from the fire over the blackened earth; however the ground cooled quite quickly as he left the wall of flames behind, leaving him panting heavily as he sank to the ground, shocked and wondering vaguely how he had lived through all these terrifying dangers.

Then he remembered the wild cat, and looked about him, but it had gone. None the less, Barty knew he must watch out for this cunning and savage meat-eating predator, or others like him. Still sounding wildly in the air were the yells and whistles of those humans he had

left between the two lines of fire, but as they had either caught or killed all the animals that were left, their calls finally faded behind the dying crackle of the flames as the two lines of fire merged in a long line, flickered briefly, before finally dying out.

Barty had never felt so tired in his life, but he knew he must move on, for he was dangerously exposed without cover of any sort while he lay on the burnt and blackened earth; at the same time he caught the familiar sounds of a murderous mob rampaging in the town that lay down a slope to his left; humans gone mad, and in their state more savage and brutal than any predatory animal. His instinct rightly told him that the wild cat would have made off up into deeper unburnt growth where he could live and hunt with little danger from humans. Barty could never have lived in the wilderness, as could the wild cat, for had he tried to do so it would not have been long before he would have fallen prey to one of these creatures, since there must be more than just the one he had seen and followed over the flames.

It was vital to get off the open ground, so he turned down the gentle slope, moving quite slowly for he felt slightly dizzy, light-headed and weak. It took some time, but eventually he reached a poor leached-out plot of land beyond the reach of the fire, on which were planted a few stems of maize, plantains and sugar stalks, along with a small variety of ground crops, cabbages, and so on.

Barty had not eaten for a long time, or so he felt, for he found it difficult to register time with all the shocks and hazards he had been through; tired and worn as he was he began to gnaw at the base of a maize stalk, bringing it crashing to the ground; the cob was unripe, but he was too hungry to care, and eat a little before passing on to a fallen plantain, and then to a poor small cabbage. As he filled his empty stomach, he became ever more soporific, and it was not long before he fell asleep where he was, in sight of any who happened to look over the plot.

In spite of his exhaustion, Barty's nerves had been so badly shaken that his sleep was restless and jumbled with mixed dream-like memories: The house, the home with his friend, The Cat, and the kindly family of humans; all were warm and loving, until the uprising and murderous madness of the savages reared up to despoil, kill and destroy; even in his dreams the sounds of crude ferocity and terror reached through to him with a stunning and terrifying impact; yet, strangely, clear and then hazy, overtopping the fear was The Cat's intangible calming presence, watching and caring.

So Barty's mind was drawn to those last minutes in the Vet's surgery, and to his dear friend, The Cat, and his courageous sacrifice to save his friend's life. 'How could he ever repay such a gallant deed?' And yet in his semi-dream state, in which his inner senses were heightened, he could not see The Cat as dead, nor life's purpose in letting him live on through such hell.

Something was not right, did not ring true: Barty's poor tired mind was lifted up into a realm of happiness and peace, and he found himself in a magic garden, playing with The Cat, running and chasing each other over a wonderfully soft blue-green grass by the side of a crystalline stream, gurgling its way over a bed of vari-coloured pebbles, while from its crinkled waters, which by reflection from the sun's rays, sprang a myriad darting lights, sprinkling their brilliance over the bank-strewn shrubs and flowers, and scintillating beyond. Barty paused in awe; in all his life he had neither seen nor imagined that such beauty and harmony could exist; his beloved friend sat next to him, and together they gazed and gazed, and in wonder never grew tired of what they saw and felt. There were

deep glowing bushes in russet and shades of green, lush bright lettuces, carrots and many other vegetables, blending in perfectly with flowers vivid with life in both brilliant and subtly hued colours, until the air around was perfumed with a perfect mix of their subtle scents; and always the intangible bond between them was strengthened. Then the scene shimmered and faded: Before Barty there was now a long low table loaded with varied food and drink, a feast to any animal or bird that walked or took flight over the Earth; while seated or standing on either side were creatures of different sorts, more than he had ever thought existed. To his left the table and the air around was lit with a wonderfully ethereal golden light, which drew him like a magnet; but as he turned to peer down the table the golden light dimmed, until his eyes could not penetrate the gloom, and he knew that he was looking back in time to when more primitive creatures walked the Earth. The loneliness and depth of darkness left Barty with a void that made his heart grow cold, and in opposition distressed him as much as playing with his friend, The Cat, had uplifted his spirits and renewed his strength in the magic garden.

Then out of the light a familiar mind-speak voice rang in his head, "Bartimeaus, Bartimeaus, come hither and sit by me." Barty turned and saw his friend, The Cat, beckoning him to a place he had not before seen in the golden light. Hope burned hotly as he ran to his friend and sat next to him. He could say nothing, his heart was too full, but his eyes and mind-speak said it all, as did those of The Cat. Still he wondered at the scene, at the glowing light and the grim darkening shadows that lay beyond, and why there was nobody at the head of the table; he was about to ask his friend, when The Cat's mind spoke to him, "There is only a short time for you here, and what you have seen is but a shadow of what will be, for it is not yet your hour, my dear friend; be patient a little longer and we will be together again in the magic garden, on the blue-green grass by the rippling stream."

The Cat's eyes shone brightly as his mind spoke, and Barty reached out to him; but in that same moment the scene shimmered and faded, the transcendence shattered by an agonising pain as his body was caught and dragged up by his sensitive ears. Barty screamed, but the coarse man only laughed as he threw him into a sack and made off.

On The Brink

So vast in opposition: from one state to another was too much for Barty; his mind staggered, and he was only dimly conscious of the thumps and bumps as his captor swung his bag in one hand, then threw it over his shoulder to pick up some object as he walked. Although just then time meant little to him, he had not long to wait, for the man soon came to his home, next to which was a small gardening shed in a poor state of repair. He opened the creaking door of the shed and tipped Barty out on to the hard earthen floor, slammed the door shut and went into his small house.

Barty began to tremble from fear and shock; he had little doubt that the coarse man had every intention of killing him, probably sooner rather than later. Nervously he looked around the shed to see if there was any possibility of escape: The place was a store of sorts, with some garden tools propped against a corner and along one side, with a heap of odds and ends littered about. The shed was embedded in the earthen floor, so where he could he snuffed his way around the sides, seeking for any weakness where he might burrow, but although he tried to dig here and there, the ground had been stamped down too hard for him to have enough effect in the time likely before the coarse man came for him.

Suddenly Barty stopped, ears pricked, his mind fully awake and alert: He had heard a faint scratching sound. He sat motionless and quiet, and was rewarded by more scratching, and several tiny snuffling noises that came from behind the propped-up tools; he had not looked there before as there was not enough space without sending the loosely stacked garden tools crashing to the ground, which would have alarmed and angered the coarse man and brought him running to the shed.

He moved towards the corner where the tools were propped: The small sounds promptly ceased. Very carefully he tried to slide behind, but even with his slight build there was not enough space. He paused and peered between the tools and that wall of the shed. What he saw made him throw caution to the winds, for rats had not only eaten away some of the wood close to the beaten ground, but had also loosened much of the hardened earthen floor. This was probably the only chance of escape he would get, so he threw himself at the narrow gap behind the tools, most of which came crashing down, with some sliding sideways, fallen or leaning against the further corners. There was a great deal of noise, more than enough to alert the coarse man in the house adjoining the shed.

Barty took no notice, but dug furiously, using all his strength. At first the going was difficult, for although the rodents had loosened the tamped-down earthen floor, the hardness went deeper, which inhibited and greatly slowed his first efforts; but he was desperate and within a minute or so had broken through the hardpan, sending broken-up chunks of earth flying through the air from his strong back legs to rattle against the wall and door behind. Deeper and deeper; but just then he heard the house door open and the hurried footsteps of the coarse man hastening towards the shed.

The door crashed open, and with a furious roar the coarse man kicked and hurled aside the fallen tools and other paraphernalia, tripping and stumbling over tumbled articles. There was chaos in the small shed, crammed with years of unsorted stores and junk; but this chaos was to Barty's advantage, for by now he had cleared a gap under the wall almost big enough for him to squeeze through. Just a little more digging, and his body was already half way under the weakened wall. The man was also near enough to stretch out and grasp his captive rabbit; but as he reached out, dried earth and dust flew up from Barty's scrabbling back legs into the coarse man's face and eyes, temporarily blinding him. This gave Barty that little extra critical time, and he was able to squirm and squeeze his way out into the open, followed by a stream of vile invective from his lost captor.

He was free again, but shaking with nervous stress. He went on for some distance before hopping into some sheltering scrub at the base of a low tree, where he could lie hidden for a time while he recovered and tried to think what to do, and where to go in this strangely inhospitable land. He had been through so much, and could not help wondering why his friend, The Cat, had used so much ingenuity and cleverness to save his life when he, Barty, was by far the weaker of the two. Why, with The Cat's agility, strength and nimbleness he could surely have saved his own life and escaped with ease; he would also have coped much better with the hazards that were really too great for a mere rabbit.

Indeed, so far it had been a miracle to have come unscathed through loneliness, fires, rampaging mobs, and just then his narrow escape from the coarse man who had caught him while he slept: Perhaps when his friend, The Cat, had said that 'It was not yet time', his words had carried a double meaning, one as a trial from The Master of the Golden Light; but more likely, for reasons unknown, that it was not yet Barty's time to leave this World: He was deeply puzzled, yet his intuition, both before and in the Vet's surgery, had

told him quite clearly when it had been The Cat's time to die; but all this was such a long time ago. The Cat's friendship was always there, but many of the more terrible events at the surgery were distorting, drifting in and out of reason and time in Barty's mind. There was no answer but to go on, no matter what lay ahead; at the same time his head drooped slowly between his paws; for a short spell his loneliness and fears slid into peace and oblivion as once again he slept, but this time peacefully without dreams, and well sheltered from any surprise attack or capture from humans, but not from reptilian predators. Barty slept on undisturbed for 15 minutes or so, and save for the distant sound of angry humans ravaging the land and homes of many of the people, there was little sound; the coarse human had long since given up hunting for his escaped rabbit, while those who had pursued various animals between the two flanks of fire, had either departed homewards or joined with one of the maddened mobs; so he dozed a while longer.

But through his light sleep he was awakened by a dry slithering sound, scarcely audible to any human ear. With every nerve tensed, Barty stayed silent and still, then slowly opened his eyes just enough to see in front and to either side: To his left and not more than half a metre ahead was a long green snake with a flattened head, and with about two-thirds of its body still gliding slowly down the branches of the tree that grew in the centre of this clump of scrub in which he had been hiding. He immediately saw the reptile as a deadly Boomslang, able to move at speed along the branches of trees, with a venomous bite, agonising and fatal, and not uncommon in this low-lying land with its swamps; The Cat, had told him about them, and once they had seen one in a tree and had kept well clear. Barty knew that his only chance lay in leaping suddenly to the right and running with all speed, for while most of the snake's body was still sliding along the branches of the tree, with only its head and lesser length near the ground; he remembered in that moment that the snake could not attain speed or striking power from its present position.

Suddenly, from being apparently asleep, Barty sprang to his right and ran across a bare patch of ground, swerved to the left and leapt off again; at the same time he glimpsed the Boomslang leaving the scrub in pursuit. He realised then how much he and The Cat had learned on their frequent morning trips, and so kept to the open ground for the next 50 metres or so before stopping, with a quick backward glance, to see the snake oiling its way back into the scrub it had just left.

Time had passed, and by now the sun lay low in the sky. Barty noticed that the cruel noises from the rampaging mobs had died away. An unnatural silence lay over the land; even the light wind had lessened, and there was a sticky evil in the air that sent tremors of unearthly fear through him, stunning his movements. He went on slowly and with care, for his mouth was parched as he became conscious of a great thirst that had to be quenched. The land was quiet and still as he followed his nose down to a swamp that lay quite close to the sea. There was still no sound, nor any movement from reptile, animal or human when he reached the water; even so he was cautious, for it was in these mangrove swamps that some of the most fearsome creatures dwelt. After listening intently, he stooped his head and drank; the water was brackish, but his need was too great to care.

After drinking, Barty was drawn to move away from the swamp and on to where he could hear the regular crunch and slide of the sea, the only sound that could not be stopped by whatever evil was afoot. He loped on slowly, for he was afraid of the unnerving silence behind him, and he had to pass some huts where humans dwelt, although not a sound came from any of them, no voices nor movements, nothing. He went on towards the sea that lay a short distance beyond the huts, and with relief breathed in the fresh tang from the on-shore breeze; then almost to the edge of the water, where he stopped: Barty's

bright spirit soared as he watched, entranced by the rolling rhythm as each wave rose higher, then grandly tripped over the ascending beach, curling away in a long coastal sweep, crashing in massive grandeur, with silvered droplets springing from the churning foam as it hissed up the sea-wet sand; then, barely pausing, the wave's strength spent, splaying out and tiredly sliding back with increasing speed, only to be swallowed down the throat of the next ascending giant. An unusual setting in which to find any rabbit, but here Barty felt clean, uplifted and unafraid. But this state could not last, when a few moments later he saw movement far along the beach: a gathering of many hundreds of humans, grouped in a huge almost silent circle. What little sounds they made had been drowned by the closer crump and collapsing spread of the waves. Barty looked over towards the huge group of people from the clean and comforting edge of the sea-shore. In one long day he had been through many perilous adventures, and even experienced some of the evil savagery from these poor debased people: The raging wanton mobs, smashing, burning and looting; some of the same humans in the killing field between the closing fires; then more nearly in time his rough treatment at the hands of the coarse man, soon followed by his frightening reptilian encounter.

In his innocence, Barty could not truly understand the concept of evil, although he reacted easily enough to good and bad, knowing well that which drew him, and that which repelled; yet here before him in the fading light was something of such concentrated evil that his very soul withered before its insidious power.

In the fading glow from the red sunset he watched, and saw by a wavering light on the faces of those gathered about that there was either a fire at the heart of the crowd, or some other source of flickering light. Rooted to the sand by its power and forced to watch, Barty heard the great crowd begin a low repetitive chant: As one the chant gathered tempo, and as one their primitive minds blended into a single mind-force from which radiated a huge magnetic pull.

The magical rhythm and beauty of the sea was rudely thrust aside by the hypnotising power of the chant, for in spite of his diminishing resistance, it drew Barty like a giant magnet, slowly but irresistibly sucking him in towards its vortex. He tried to stop, to change direction, to turn back to the wonder of the sea, but it was of no use; the evil power embodied in the chant drew him on, and he hopped slowly towards the crowd. As he drew closer the chant changed from hundreds of throats to a hum, low and penetrating, but as formidably enticing as the chant that went before. Desperately he strove to recall the golden light, the garden and his friend, The Cat; his deep intuition told him that by these alone could he save himself from being drawn into a dark pit from which he could not escape.

For a while the remembered vision swayed and flickered, nearer first, then slipping from his grasp; but at last, although the scene still shimmered slightly, he grew more steadily aware of the golden light and the shadows as each battled for supremacy, up and down the long low table; first the brilliance of the golden light mastered the shadows; then for a while the darkness overcame the light; yet Barty knew in his inner mind that the light was always there, had always been there, and that the darkness had never been; it was evil's born illusion, but very real in the world in which it lived. To and fro the battle raged in different forms, fought in timeless space, and all the while Barty reached out to the golden light and to a helping call from his friend, The Cat.

Meanwhile his body, under the hypnotic influence of the low, penetrating hum from the great crowd of humans, drew him ever closer to the outer ring; scarcely 15 metres had any

of them turned to look; but they were all mindlessly entranced in their ceremonial voodoo dance. Now, in perfect cadence their hum began to rise and fall, and many hundreds of feet began stamping in rhythm, moving forwards and swinging outwards; as a giant circle turns and expands, so did these primitive dancers begin to revolve and swell in their growing frenzy.

Barty knew there was very little time left to him; he made one last desperate call to his friend, The Cat. For a moment there was nothing; then two things happened in a timeless moment: Barty felt himself snatched from where he stood, helpless in the hypnotic grip of the voodoo rhythm; casting its evil spell his body was dashed to the ground and stamped into nothing but shattered bones and bloodied fur by the blind, dancing march of stamping feet. At the same time he felt himself lifted up, up into the golden light and the warm clasp of The Cat. So one in time were these changes, that Barty actually saw his body being plucked from the sand by the nearest dancer and cast to the ground, stamped and crushed into the sand by their mindless dancing feet; he was even aware of the residual terror and agony, yet felt no pain, only peace.

Brilliance filled Barty's life, and even after the swiftly moving, stunning shocks, he was fully conscious of his friend, The Cat, leading him to his place at the table in the golden light, while their thoughts again blended in easy communicating harmony. No mind-words were needed for Bartimeaus to know that his time, too, had at last come, and that he was home.

Enlightenment

Several weeks later, having roughed it through some hard-won trials, the father arrived home, relieved to be with his family again, although for an hour or so he had been left alone in their garden, and was thankful for this: He needed to be by himself to try and sort out the turmoil in his mind. The air was light, filled with the hum of bees and the warm scents of a summer's evening, while his mind began to drift back to 'The Forgotten Land', unimpeded by any disturbing distractions. The mother, with their two children, had returned safely, even if the creaking old flat-bottomed ship had given them an uncomfortable voyage; a small sweating cabin, the interminable groaning of the ship's plates as they strained against their rivets in the twisting currents, and the nauseating stench of sea-sickness from its almost continuous pitching and rolling; but above all there had been her deep concern for her husband's safety; she knew he had come through several tight spots before, yet there was always the one too many, and this she feared.

The father was leaner and weary, his right arm bound and in a sling from a deep hatchet slash while trying to reach the small fishermen's harbour after having to leave his car. Soon after he left the vet, wary and alert, he was faced by a savage mob, that barred his route and was heading his way. It was impossible to avoid them; confrontation was inevitable. Prepared for most eventualities, he leapt out of the car, left the engine running, tore a long saturated rag out of the petrol tank, which he had thoughtfully stuffed in place of the cap, emptied a can of petrol over the seats, lit the rag and threw the flaming torch into the car, finally dropping some remnants of the burning taper back into the tank, allowing air to pass so that the fumes would soon ignite, hopefully as a moderate explosion and followed by fire.

With no time to lose, he pushed the car down the slight slope towards the ululating mob, then turned and sprinted along side-streets and alley-ways towards the fishermen's harbour. In their maddened blood-lust some of them began to chase him; but, as he had anticipated, a moment later there was a dull thudding sound and a whoosh of flame sprang

from the car, which became a rolling fireball as it moved with increasing speed towards the menacing mob.

It was too much for these poor savages; they loved the power of fire, so while they scattered out of the car's immediate path, their minds were gripped by the flaming spectacle. Of those who had chased the father, all turned back save for one who was close upon him, a powerfully built savage with the madness of blood-lust flaming in his eyes; it was as a result of this terrible fight that the father's left arm was deeply slashed; yet he managed to overcome his attacker, whom he left lying on the bloodied pavement, alive but stunned, for the blood had been the father's. After this he continued more slowly to the fishermen's harbour, stemming his bleeding arm as best he could by binding it as he went with a torn sleeve and a handkerchief partially soaked in petrol.

There was only one boat left lying in the small harbour, for the others had already put to sea away from the troubled land. From this point on there was not so much difficulty that a modest bundle of U.S.Dollars could not overcome; armed with this persuasion he made his way by slow and staggered stages, until finally he came to a town with an airport; from there, by indirect routes, coping against weakness from the after-effects of fever and blood-loss, he finally got flights to England. From time to time, and particularly now that he was home, the father had wondered about Bartimeaus and The Cat; their presence was deeply embedded in his mind, for there was a mystery and a message surrounding these two animals in which, in some intangible way, he felt himself to be deeply involved; time and again while en-route from the 'Forgotten Land' he had tried to shake aside their memory, but when striving to do so their close presence was only strengthened. Now, alone for a while and relaxing in the warm sunshine, his thoughts free from his children's self-indulgent inquisitiveness against what must be, he allowed his mind to wander and follow where this persistent mystery led.

Slowly, then more swiftly and clearly, his mind opened and he was caught up in Barty's thoughts, actions and adventures; but less fully into those of The Cat, for here his inner sight was partially obscured by seeing only through Barty's mind. Then in one glowing timeless moment the whole strange and fascinating drama opened wide and flooded his mind with living clarity: Barty's simple thoughts, his clear love, his adventures and fears, were all now in linking sequence and deeply rooted in his mind.

Then there were Barty's dreams, his visions and his quick and innocent perception to take in and love the harmony and beauty in nature's perfect balance; first in the magic garden with The Cat, then later alone and for a while completely absorbed in the power and rhythm of the sea, from the growing swell of the waves before they rose like giants before crumpling in splintered spume, recklessly casting their last energies in sliding up the smooth wet sand, only to be drawn back again, beaten and defeated, to be drawn back into the rising power of the engulfing maw of the following wave, before it too slid stricken against the land. The more the father saw through Barty's eyes, the more greatly he wondered at the miracle of life, and of how that light shone so clearly through the eyes of a rabbit.

The balance of life both here and beyond, the powerful bond between the two animals, in which the Cat's role appeared to be more directly linked with destiny; his terrible fight with death in the Vet's: that scene was burned into the father's mind; besides his own concern for the Cat, the sacrifice for Barty's life was a mystery in itself; but he had been helpless to save either at the time; nor, he thought, had it been meant: both animals had been caught

up in a tangled web of destiny, in which he too had played a role. But save as an onlooker, what was that role?

The father was still very tired, and his eyes closed as he sank into that state in which he was both conscious, and yet drifting into a world of dreams... But these were more than dreams; they were far-reaching visions, cruel yet beautiful and wonderfully enlightening; a light such as could never have been meant for these two animals alone, but for any who would listen. Humans were often so wrapped in their worldly cocoons that they could neither perceive the glory nor the light, nor also the deep darkness that hung so close about them; not even in perspective could they see that savagery, cruelty, greed and evil, were there as a satanic and enticing barriers.

Here was knowledge: a vivid insight into Paradise; a clear-cut link between God and man and beast. Indeed, there were many more mysteries here than were at first apparent, and which would reveal greater riches with thought and time; but incredible and wonderful as it was, even this did not lift the insidious burden from his mind until, until what? For a short while the father's mind groped in the thinning mist that fleetingly swept across his mind.

But with the unspoken question hovering but a moment, the answer flashed back: until he had written down their wonderful and incredible story, and only when he had done so, could he live in its adventures, and love its grace and peace of mind.

This the father did; and it came about that the story of Bartimeaus and The Cat, as inscribed here, was told, and re-told many times. Only when the father's task was finished was his mind set free; he would always remember, but not in the head-lock of compulsion.

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[Written in three parts]